RAMMSTEIN

8 PAGES OF ZEIT – THE ALBUM! THE VIDEO! THE HAMMER VERDICT!

METAL HAMMER

METALLICA

"ENTER SANDMAN WAS CORNY!"
Newsted: The Hammer Interview

MATT HEAFY x IHSAHN
Inside 2022's coolest collab

CARPENTER BRUT
One serial killer. Many synths

METAL LORDS
Tom Morello. D.B. Weiss. Corpsepaint on Netflix

FROM ROCK BOTTOM TO ROCK STAR

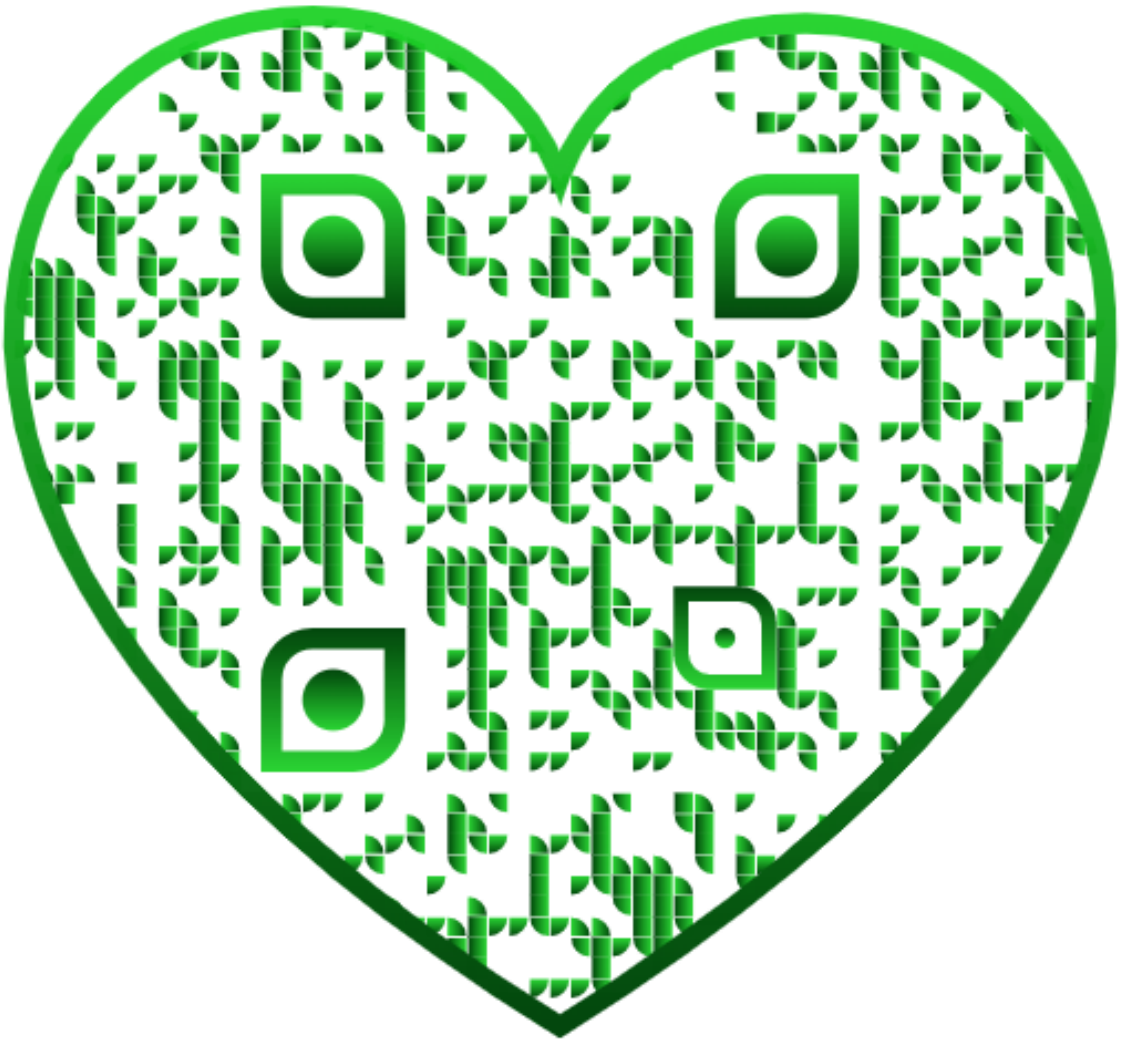
HALESTORM

HOW LZZY FOUGHT HERSELF AND WON

+

KING DIAMOND
SHINEDOWN
AMON AMARTH
JUDAS PRIEST
GIANT WALKER
NAPALM DEATH

FUTURE
ISSUE 361



RAMMSTEIN

ZEIT

THE NEW ALBUM

29+04+22

CD | SPECIAL EDITION CD (6-PANEL DIGIPAK) | 2LP | DIGITAL

METAL HAMMER

Future PLC, 121 - 141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London, W2 6JR
Web: www.metalhammer.com
Letters: metalhammer@futurenet.com

Editorial
Editor **Eleanor Goodman**
eleanor.goodman@futurenet.com
Production Editor **Vanessa Thorpe**
vanessa.thorpe@futurenet.com
Reviews Editor **Jonathan Selzer**
jonathan.selzer@futurenet.com
Art Editor **Louise Brock**
louise.brock@futurenet.com
Associate Editor **Dave Everley**
dave.everley@futurenet.com
Contributing Editor **Paul Brannigan**
paul.branningan@futurenet.com
Staff Writer **Rich Hobson**
rich.hobson@futurenet.com
Content Director – Music **Scott Rowley**

Contributors
Steve Appleford, Oliver Badin, Richard Chamberlain, Chris Chantler, Alec Chillingworth, Joe Daly, Hywel Davies, Remfry Dedman, Alex Deller, Jerry Ewing, Connie Gordon, Spencer Grady, Stephen Hill, Emma Johnston, Tyler Damara Kelly, Hannah May Kilroy, Dom Lawson, Elliot Leaver, Dannii Leivers, Dave Ling, Clay Marshall, Will Marshall, Sophie Maughan, Edwin McFee, Joel McIver, Matt Mills, Mórat, Tom O'Boyle, Adam Rees, Alastair Riddell, Elizabeth Scarlett, Rosie Solomon, James Weaver, Christina Wenig, Kez Whelan, Jon Wiederhorn, Holly Wright, Nik Young

Cover Photography: John McMurtrie **Carpenter Brut bundle:** Førtifem
Image Manipulation: Gary Stuckey **Design:** John Woolford
Subbing: Jayne Nelson

Photography
Ben Bentley, Justin Borucki, Derek Bremner, Steve Bright, Janson Bulpin, Stephanie Cabral, Duncan Everson, Nick Fancher, Andy Ford, Mick Hutson, Will Ireland, Simon Kallas, Tina Korhonen, Marie Korner, John McMurtrie, Kevin Nixon, Katja Ogrin, Jake Owens, Emma Painter, Tom Russell, Jeremy Saffer, Ester Segarra, James Sharrock, Travis Shinn, Frank White, Jonathan Weiner, Dani Willgress, Neil Zlozower
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Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove** - **clare.dove@futurenet.com**
Advertising Manager **Helen Hughes** - **helen.hughes@futurenet.com**
Account Director **Steven Pyatt** - **steven.pyatt@futurenet.com**
Account Director **Ayomide Magbagbeola** - **ayomide.magbagbeola@futurenet.com**

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Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

ALL HAIL HALESTORM

WHEN I WAS 18, I entered a *Metal Hammer* competition to review Australian grindcore band The Berzerker. With their gnarly masks and record-breaking rapid drumming, the show was a baptism of fire for a nu metal kid who had suddenly landed in extreme metal territory – but no matter what the subgenre, I knew I wanted to be a music journalist. It was a thrill to win and see my review in print, and it's a thrill many years later to become editor of this very magazine.

It's also a great pleasure to welcome Halestorm to the cover, a band on the rockier end of the spectrum who nevertheless fit neatly into our world. We've been following the quartet's progress closely, and after featuring them as one of four 'Heroes Of 2017' covers in January of that year, we invited them back ahead of their excellent new album, *Back From The Dead*.

Our Dannii Leivers spoke to Lzzy Hale about what happened when the band life she'd known since the age of 13 came to a shuddering halt during the pandemic, and how she rediscovered herself – resulting in their heaviest album yet. And let's face it, after the last couple of chaotic years, who wouldn't want to scream along to some massive, arena-sized anthems?

Stay metal,

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR
@ELEANORGOODMAN

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MEET THE BAND

MARIE KORNER
Photographer
We asked Marie to capture the magic of our coverstars, Halestorm, at their intimate An Evening With... show at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire. It was the first gig she'd shot since the pandemic, and she didn't disappoint.

RICH HOBSON
Staff Writer
Rich has been putting pen to paper for *Hammer* for years, but this month we're welcoming him to the famileh as staff writer for the mag and online. In these pages, he digs into Rammstein's new album and Netflix drama *Clark*.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH
Writer
Our man in Sweden, and master of the pun, Alec's writing always makes us laugh out loud. This month he spoke to synthwave sensation Carpenter Brut, and found out what's next for serial killer Bret Halford.

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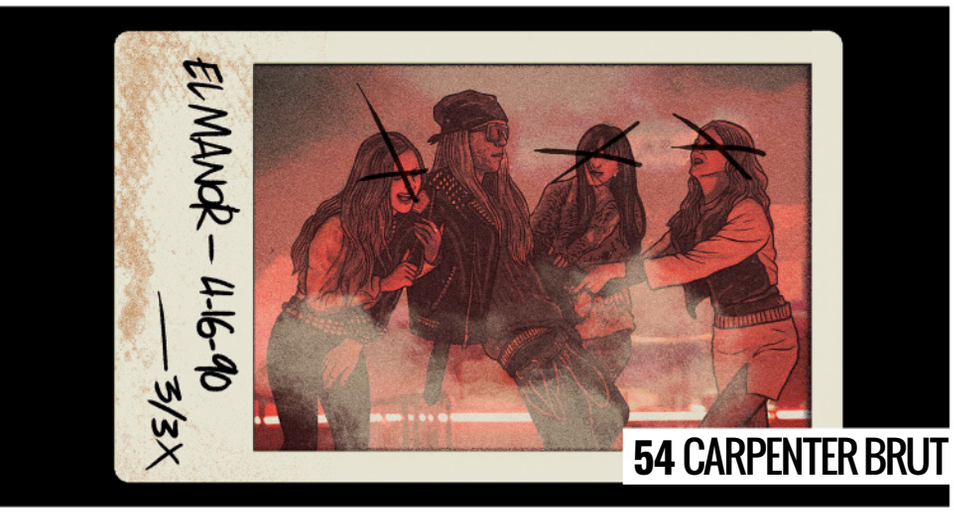

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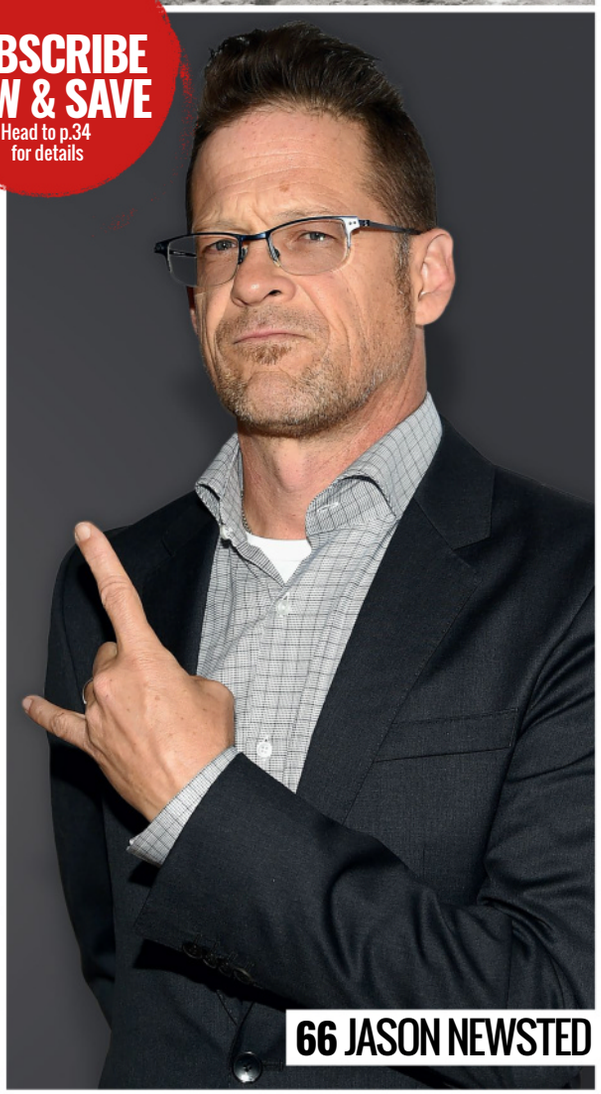

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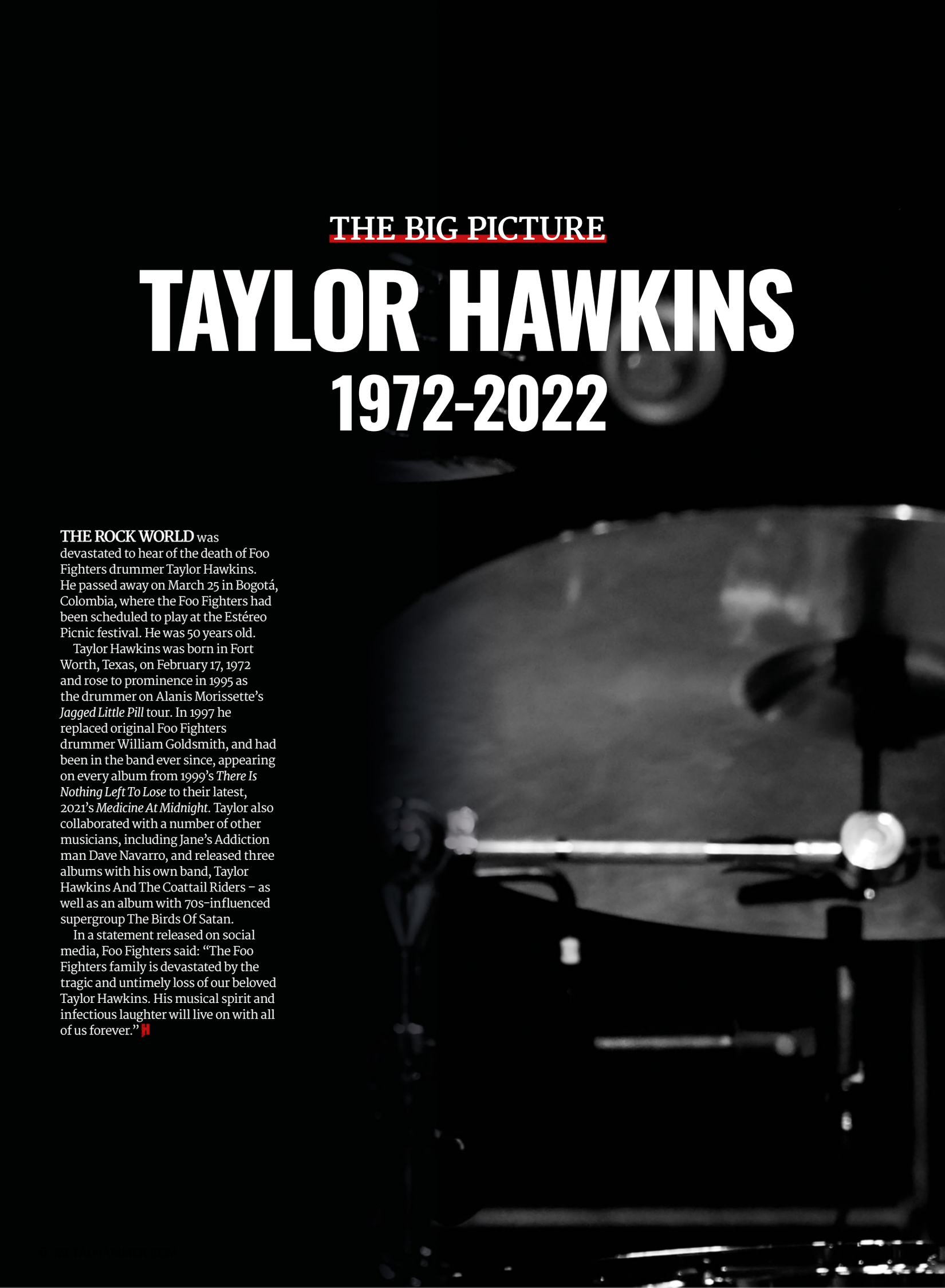
THE BIG PICTURE

TAYLOR HAWKINS 1972-2022



THE ROCK WORLD was devastated to hear of the death of Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins. He passed away on March 25 in Bogotá, Colombia, where the Foo Fighters had been scheduled to play at the Estéreo Picnic festival. He was 50 years old.

Taylor Hawkins was born in Fort Worth, Texas, on February 17, 1972 and rose to prominence in 1995 as the drummer on Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill* tour. In 1997 he replaced original Foo Fighters drummer William Goldsmith, and had been in the band ever since, appearing on every album from 1999's *There Is Nothing Left To Lose* to their latest, 2021's *Medicine At Midnight*. Taylor also collaborated with a number of other musicians, including Jane's Addiction man Dave Navarro, and released three albums with his own band, Taylor Hawkins And The Coattail Riders – as well as an album with 70s-influenced supergroup The Birds Of Satan.

In a statement released on social media, Foo Fighters said: "The Foo Fighters family is devastated by the tragic and untimely loss of our beloved Taylor Hawkins. His musical spirit and infectious laughter will live on with all of us forever."

GETTY

THE HOT TOPIC

METAL LORDS IS THE METAL MOVIE WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR

Created by *Game Of Thrones* showrunner D.B. Weiss and with music from Tom Morello, Netflix's coming-of-age movie *Metal Lords* is a love letter to the scene

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: SCOTT PATRICK GREEN/NETFLIX

HOLLYWOOD HASN'T ALWAYS got rock and metal right. For every *Bill & Ted* or *Sound Of Metal*, there's been a *Rock Of Ages* or *American Satan*. But recently released Netflix coming-of-age movie *Metal Lords* definitely sits in the former camp – it's one of the few times the scene has been accurately and lovingly represented on the screen.

"The idea was of doing a coming-of-age movie within that specific subculture, with kids who loved this music," D.B. Weiss, the film's writer, director and producer, tells *Metal Hammer*. "I couldn't think of too many movies that really focused on that, so I felt that if we hit the bullseye, it would appeal to people who really love and live the music."

It helps that the people behind *Metal Lords* have some heavyweight pedigree. D.B. is the former co-showrunner on *Game Of Thrones*, and he enlisted Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello as executive music producer.

Above: Adrian Greensmith as Hunter, a teenage metal obsessive

The Metal Lords of the title are two teenage metal fans and outsiders, Kevin (played by *It* and *Knives Out* star Jaeden Martell) and Hunter (newcomer Adrian Greensmith), who form the excellently named Skullfucker to compete in their high school Battle Of The Bands contest. For D.B., who was a huge metal fan himself growing up, it was important to offer an authentic and recognisable set of characters that real-life metal fans could see themselves in.

"Hunter needed to feel like a real kid who really loved this stuff," he explains. "Obviously there is no rule book – there's no playbook to this stuff. I was like, 'Do we put an Eddie Van Halen guitar on his wall?' I know there would be some people that would go, 'Fuck no! That's not real metal!' But then there would be other people who would go, 'Of course, you *have* to do that!'

"There is no right answer there. But it felt like he was a kid with an encyclopaedic knowledge of this world, and was obsessive."

"I FELT IT WOULD APPEAL TO PEOPLE WHO REALLY LOVE AND LIVE THE MUSIC"

This attention to detail is baked into the film. *Metal Lords* doesn't just namedrop obvious icons such as Iron Maiden, Metallica and Black Sabbath, but dives deeper to reference Opeth, Meshuggah, Celtic Frost and more.

"The *To Mega Therion* album cover was important to have in there," says D.B., referencing Celtic Frost's landmark 1985 album. "There were days where we were done and wrapped, and I'd suddenly go, 'Did we get an insert of that album cover?' And they said no, so I was like, 'Please everyone, five more minutes, we need to get that album cover in there.' There were some things that I *knew* just needed to be in the movie."

While D.B. himself knows the subject well, the presence of Tom Morello helps get every nuance of the world created in *Metal Lords* spot on,

Emily (Isis Hainsworth), a cellist who gets into metal, with drummer Kevin (Jaeden Martell)

lending some serious rock credibility to the movie in the process.

"Dan [D.B.] told me about the idea for this movie and asked would I like to be involved," Tom tells *Hammer*. "That is low-hanging fruit. Metal was my first love – it was the posters on my wall, it was what I aspired to be as a person. I asked him 'What's my job?' and he said, 'Let's talk about the music, but I definitely need you to write a song, and the song will be called *Machinery Of Torment*.' I said, 'I've been waiting my whole life to write a song called *Machinery Of Torment*!' So I did!"

Given that particular song plays a pivotal part in the movie's Battle Of The Bands scene, it was crucial that it sounded both realistic and raging.

"Over the course of 22 records, I've made metal that is mixed with rap and rock and alternative," says Tom. "What do I do when I make metal that is cut with nothing but more metal? What is that going to sound like? So as my fingers were writing these riffs, I had that in mind: 'This is *only* going to be a metal song!'"

Much like Skullfucker themselves trying to convert a school full of non-metal fans into headbangers in the movie, so D.B. believes that *Metal Lords* is enough of a love letter to the metal scene that it can win over anyone not already immersed in it.

"Fingers crossed," he nods. "That's one of the reasons I wanted to do it: getting people interested in music they really hadn't thought too much about. In the right setting, in the right circumstances, this music has the power to convert people on the spot, and that's a very special thing that I love about it."

***METAL LORDS* IS STREAMING ON NETFLIX NOW**

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

VILLE VALO IS BACK!
With new solo music and an updated Ville Valo Heartagram!

DAVID DRAIMAN LIKES LITTLE NAS X
The Disturbed frontman defended him against US TV host Greg Kelly, who objected to the rapper's Grammys set.

SPIRITBOX ARE WRITING
They're already working on eight new songs. Please be good!

METAL HAS A NEW EMOJI!
Bored with throwing the horns? Now you can express the power of a face-melting riff, by using a cute melted face.

SPONGECORE IS A THING
SpongeBob SquarePants x Knocked Loose = Spongecore thanks to TikTok musician Galo.

METALLICA ARE STILL AWESOME
Their All Within My Hands Foundation has donated $500,000 to help provide meals for those who have fled Ukraine.

KORN + EVANESCENCE ARE TOURING
They're teaming up for a jaunt around the US. Can you come to the UK, please?

BABYMETAL HAVE STARTED A NEW CHAPTER
It's called The Other One, and features NFT sneakers and the 'Metalverse'. Only the Fox God knows what it all means.

GHOST'S MOCKUMENTARY IS GREAT
YouTube docco *Metal Myths Part 2* explores the 'histories and mysteries' surrounding the band. Ooh!

THE CROW IS GETTING REBOOTED
IT actor Bill Skarsgård is set to play Eric, with Rupert Sanders (*Ghost In The Shell*) directing. Will it finally happen?

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A GHOST?

Yes, occult metal icon King Diamond has, since you ask. But that's nowhere near as scary as him coming face to face with your questions…

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURE: JIMMY HUBBARD

WITH HIS ICONIC makeup, distinctive falsetto wail and OTT stage show, occult metal legend King Diamond is a genuine one-off – just ask famous fans Lars Ulrich, Jason 'Jay And Silent Bob' Mewes and Post Malone. The man born Kim Bendix Petersen has influenced countless bands and artists during his 40-plus year career, though there have been some hairy moments too – not least the triple bypass surgery he had in 2010 following a series of heart attacks. With his original band Mercyful Fate reunited and due to headline this year's Bloodstock, we put your burning questions to him on everything from supernatural experiences to getting sued by Gene Simmons.

You were King from the beginning. Did you think about starting out with a less audacious title such as Baron, Viscount or Prince?
Jo Fleischer, Facebook
"Man, the name… it came from all the way back in Brainstorm [King's first band]. People thought that people wouldn't be able to pronounce our Danish names, because we were going to be huge! I don't know how I came up with that name, but it stuck. It worked out pretty well."

When will Mercyful Fates' new album be out?
@AnderschEric, Twitter
"King Diamond's album will be out first. The label wanted that first and that's what you're going to get. It's all a big push-back [because of Covid], but when we come back with Mercyful Fate we are going to be coming with new songs, and it's going to be a production like you've never seen. So, King Diamond album first and then we'll get down to business with Mercyful Fate."

Who does your makeup and do you have any tips?
Sophie Miller, Facebook
"I've always done my makeup, from day one. The first video we did for [King Diamond's 1987 single] *The Family Ghost* was in England, and we had hired two girls to do the makeup for me. I don't think the label trusted me to get it right. So I was sat there in the chair and they were putting all this stuff on my face and it felt so weird, because I know my face and I know how to get it right. It went so wrong that halfway through I said, 'Right, stop, this is a waste of time!' and I rubbed it all off and did it myself."

King and late bass player Timi Hansen, with the ghost (background) in 2011

Have you ever seen a ghost?
Mark Peachy, Facebook
"I have many stories. Back in the early days of Mercyful Fate, my apartment in Copenhagen was haunted. Many people saw. I've never done drugs, so it wasn't that – this was real stuff. And I have a photo of a ghost from when we played with Metallica in 2011. There were four of us hanging out in the bar. We took some pictures and when they came back there was this figure behind us that was totally see-through, wearing clothes from a completely different time [see below]. Very odd."

How's the old ticker these days?
James Manon, email
"I just had my first quarterly. I want to do it quarterly, to keep tabs on it as much as possible. It's perfect. Ever since my doctor gave me the regime that I'm on now, nothing has changed at all. So it's working pretty well."

When did you discover you could sing that high?
Oliver Fisher, Facebook
"It happened when an early fan told me I should work on my falsetto. He said the high notes really suit what we were doing; this was in an early version of Black Rose [King's pre-Mercyful Fate band]. I didn't really know what he was talking about, but I decided to try and give it a go. That fan is an important

INSET: M WALOP/PRESS

King Diamond: inspirational songwriter and makeup maestro

“I MET POST MALONE BACKSTAGE AT A SLAYER CONCERT. I DIDN’T KNOW WHO HE WAS”

Raising a glass to the clerks of this world

"I WAS NEVER INFLUENCED BY KISS. THEY WERE NOT THE FIRST TO WEAR MAKEUP"

part of my career. I can still picture him now, I could draw him for you if you gave me a pencil, haha!"

What was it like to see yourself immortalised as a video game character on *Guitar Hero: Metallica*?
Dan Knight, email
"Surreal. Even though people have filmed shows and I've seen myself in videos, it was weird. There was a tiny bit of censorship involved, as you don't see the cross on my forehead. It was very well done, fun to see, but I never played it myself. My wife got it and played it immediately until she could unlock me. It was just Lemmy and myself, an old friend. That was nice."

Gene Simmons sued you for allegedly ripping off his makeup. Have you bumped into him since?
Eddie Cook, Facebook
"No, I haven't. I think that would be a lot of fun. I have no outstanding stuff with him. There's a lot of reasons why this happened: they'd dropped their makeup around this time, but they still had the copyright on the look. I was never influenced by them – my influences were Peter Gabriel and Alice Cooper. I said, 'I don't have a lot of money that you can sue me for, but you have a lot of money that other people can sue you for.' They were not the first to wear makeup. It never got to be a lawsuit, it just got stirred up."

Which band are you most proud of inspiring?
Andrew Kenny, Twitter
"Oh, there are many, but it has to be Metallica. They are the biggest metal band in the world, and for them to be inspired and to cover some of our songs, it's a huge honour. Lars called me from their studio and said, 'Want to hear something new?' and he played me their *Mercyful Fate* medley and told me it was going to be on an album! Blown away. We've played it a few times with them, too."

Would you collaborate with a pop or hip hop star like Ozzy did with Post Malone? Who would you pick?
Stacey Graham, Facebook
"I never actually heard that song, but I did meet Post Malone backstage at a Slayer concert. It was funny, because he got a picture with me and I didn't know who he was. It was only later that I found out he was this huge star, far bigger than I'll ever be. I don't know much about new music – the closest I'll ever get is probably being on the Volbeat song *Room 24*. They are a fantastic band, I think their new album is the very best they've done."

When was the last time you spoke to Lars Ulrich? What did you talk about?
Peter Wade, email
"He came to my hotel in 2019 when we were on tour. It was right at the end, on Thanksgiving, and he had a big family dinner so he couldn't come to the show. I came back to the hotel after the gig and I was taking my makeup off. My wife called over to me, 'Hey, Lars is on the phone!' I said, 'No! At this time?!' but it was him. He asked how the gig was and he said if I wasn't doing anything he would come over to the hotel. So he just turned up at my hotel and we talked for a few hours, just about his family and how his kids are growing up. He's a great guy, the same awesome person I met in 1984."

Were you aware of Trivium when you did the song *In The Fire* with Matt Heafy for the Roadrunner United project?
Darren Sayers, Facebook
"I was not aware of them at the time, but I know Matt locked himself away and just studied Mercyful Fate for a few days before he wrote the song. He already knew a lot, but he really tried to suck in as much as he could of the style. He did a good job, it turned out well. I know them now and I think they're a fantastic band."

How do you feel about celebrities wearing metal t-shirts? Ever seen any wearing a Mercyful Fate shirt?
James Freeman, email
"Oh, yes. The drummer from Blink 182 had one [Travis Barker]. Jason Mewes from Jay And Silent Bob has one on a lot – they used *Welcome Home* and *The Invisible Guests* in *Clerks II*. I met them on my tour in 2019, outside my hotel. We were checking out and they had just finished a show. There they were, Kevin Smith and Jason Mewes coming out of the elevator. They had seen our flight cases so they knew King Diamond was in the hotel. I said, 'Hey guys!' And they said, 'Are you with the King Diamond band?' I said, 'Kinda… this is King!' They freaked out! It was very funny."

MERCYFUL FATE HEADLINE BLOODSTOCK ON SATURDAY AUGUST 13

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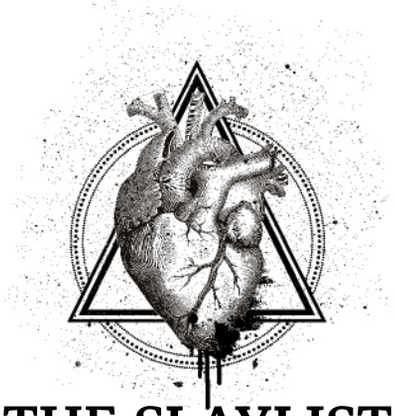

THE SLAYLIST

JO QUAIL

What do Ghost, Pink Floyd and Tchaikovsky have in common? They're all rattling around inside the head of metal's cello queen

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: NICK HODGSON

Triptykon provided a "lightbulb moment" for Jo Quail

"ONE OF THE earliest tracks I remember is *Sylvia* by **FOCUS**. I had a great music teacher all the way through to until I was 18, and when he died recently, I went to his funeral and discovered he was in a band who used to play that song. So that was an important track, and it's one I still listen to, and it's one I still feel very fondly about. It's incredibly uplifting as well.

"The children's choir from **PINK FLOYD**'s *Another Brick In The Wall* was from a school near mine in Hackney, and that song was a big influence musically, along with [Floyd's 1973 album] *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. I was continually discovering them all the way through my teens.

"At the same time **W.A.S.P.** came along, and that was a real game-changer. The first track I heard of theirs was *Forever Free*. I think Blackie Lawless is amazing and my treasured possession is a signed album from him. I love the energy, and the fact that they managed to deliver so much power and heft without necessarily detuning.

"I was hugely into **JUDAS PRIEST** when I was 18 and 19, and *Electric Eye* showcases Halford in his absolute glory. He also has a very distinctive sound to his voice and, obviously, a huge range. Again, people weren't actually detuning very much in those times, so there is much more energy by design or by accident in music because of that.

"The last movement on **TCHAIKOVSKY**'s *Symphony #6, 'Pathétique'*, is incredibly powerful. What makes something heavy is often the intention, and he wrote it right at the end of his life. The whole thing pulls and pushes you emotionally.

"When **JANE'S ADDICTION**'s *Ritual De Lo Habitual* came out, I hadn't heard anything like them. There's so much going on in *Three Days* and Perry Farrell has such a distinct voice. It's not beautifully pitched; there are microtonal dissonances which gives it enormous power and rawness. I thought, 'I'm going to try to do that on the cello with my track *Mandrel Cantus*.' You end up with this quite unhinged but very dramatic effect.

"I remember **AMON TOBIN**'s *Rhino Jockey* being played at the [London goth/industrial nirvana] Slimelight club. It was inspiring how it built and how things kept getting added. He uses computer software, but it taught me what was possible on my loop station when it comes to building and maintaining energy in a piece of music.

"I don't yet fully appreciate everything by **CARDIACS**, but I love *Stoneage Dinosaurs*. It has a slow pulse all the way through and things are added, taken away, then added again. By the end you have extraordinary chord sequences going on, and everybody is playing a solo or at the same time. I love the space in it.

"**TRIPTYKON**'s *In The Sleep Of Death* was inspirational too. It has such poise and weight, but what I love is just before Tom G Fischer starts to sing, there's a single guitar line that's got a delay on it. It's brilliant. When I heard that, a lightbulb went on and I thought, 'Why don't I make my percussion like this?' And from that point on is when I started to work with percussion and delay. It was a real pivotal moment.

"**MICK GORDON**'s *The Icon Of Sin*, from the *Doom Eternal* game soundtrack, has got a heavy metal choir on it. During lockdown, it inspired me to put together my own choir of people recording themselves singing. He's got a massive sound; how he matches the pitch to things like gunfire in the game made me think about how I do film scores.

"The first **GHOST** track I heard was *Dance Macabre*, but *Call Me Little Sunshine* is the one currently on the go. I love how they more than tip the hat to all the things I love about rock; they're not afraid of a big fat riff, and the production is superb. They just marry the right amount of theatrics with really great songwriting." MH

LISTEN NOW
Head to **spoti.fi/3j1Wggs** to listen to Jo Quail's Slaylist

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LIFE LESSONS

BRENT SMITH

From drunken run-ins with the law to urinating next to A-list stars, this is what life has taught Shinedown's singer

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: JIMMY FONTAINE

BRENT SMITH IS mid-conversation when a figure appears behind him on the Zoom screen. It's his grandmother. It turns out the Shinedown frontman is in a room in her house in Knoxville, Tennessee, the city where he grew up. "Any time I have 48 hours free, I'll come and see her and my parents," he says. "I'm the son with his laundry bag turning up at the door: 'Surprise, I'm coming in!'" Family is a big deal to the singer, as becomes clear when he lays out what he's learned from his 44 years on the planet.

I KNEW WHAT I WANTED TO DO WHEN I WAS TWO

"It sounds weird, but I knew I wanted to sing from when I was really, really young, even though I didn't really know what singing or performing was. I just loved the idea that I could do something with my voice, and I wanted to feed myself with as much knowledge as I could about all different kinds of sound."

LIKING METAL AND ROCK WHEN YOU GROW UP IN A RELIGIOUS FAMILY IS TOUGH

"I was brought up in a very religious household, and my mom and dad didn't understand what was going on. Rock'n'roll was the Devil. I got a friend of mine to get their older brother to get me Guns N' Roses' *Appetite For Destruction*, and I'd sneak into the closet at night with headphones to listen to it. I must have bought *...And Justice For All* by Metallica on cassette 11 times. They'd find it and throw it away; I'd buy it again. Then they'd find it and throw it away, and I'd buy it again."

I WAS A WAYWARD KID

"I was a rebel, and I did get in trouble with the law a lot. Never maliciously, to the point where I was hurting anyone or doing anything bad in that regard. But, y'know, alcohol, drugs, the wrong people in the wrong places at the wrong time… I'm lucky to be alive, if I'm being totally honest with you. But my parents never abandoned me, even when I was messing up and being difficult."

MY MOM AND DAD NEVER STOOD IN MY WAY

"I remember sitting at the table and my dad going, 'We don't understand what you want to do with your life, but we know how passionate you are about it, and if you stay here in this city, you are going to die here in this city. Whatever it is you want, go after it.' That's why my parents are badass. They're truly the biggest fans of the band now."

DON'T EVER SLAP AWAY A HELPING HAND

"If you want to do something or be something, and you really want to achieve it, don't slap away anyone who tries to help you. If somebody says, 'You're not ready, but if you'll let me help you, I will!' Take that hand."

THE UNIVERSE WILL PUT YOU ON THE RIGHT PATH

"And it will help you gravitate towards the people you need to gravitate towards. But you have to listen to it. And it may be a struggle, it may hurt, but that's part of the journey. If you didn't work for it, then of course it wouldn't be worth it."

FAILURE MAKES YOU STRONGER

"Your legacy isn't built by your success, it's built by the fact that you refuse to give up. My very first band, Dreve, were signed to Atlantic Records, and I was dropped about a year into demoing with them, but it didn't feel like failure, it just made me determined. Even then it took three or four years of hard work to get Shinedown off the ground – planes, trains, automobiles, sharing hotel rooms, getting in front of anyone I could get in front of."

IF TOUGH DECISIONS NEED MAKING, MAKE THEM

"Before [third album] *The Sound Of Madness*, we knew we needed to make some really hard decisions and change a couple of members. That's when we got Zach [Myers, guitarist] and Eric [Bass, bassist] in. It wasn't easy to make those changes, and a lot of people were like, 'This band is over, this band is done.' We could have failed, but that's what made this band what it is today."

I NEVER DRANK OR DID DRUGS TO HAVE A GOOD TIME

"I drank and did drugs to fall down. A very close friend of mine, who is still a close friend, watched me do that a lot back in the day. This lady saw me at my worst. She found me passed out on the floor in the kitchen. She saw me, picked me up and sobered me up enough to talk to me. She said, 'You have all these people around you that love you, but this other guy inside of you, he's trying to kill you. Every time you let him out, his goal is not to have fun, it is to see if he can end your existence.'"

I'M WAY MORE DANGEROUS WHEN I'M SOBER

"That same young lady said something that profoundly changed the way I looked at addiction. She looked at me and said, 'When you're sober and clear-headed and you have all your wits about you, that's when you're the most dangerous.' And a lightbulb went off above my head. The way she said it, I knew exactly what she meant. And she said another thing to me, which was, 'Get your head out of your ass and get back in the game.' It's still the best piece of advice anyone has given me."

I DON'T GET OVERAWED BY FAMOUS PEOPLE, BUT THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS

"We were rehearsing in Nashville in 2007 and we could hear this band next to us playing these kind of bluegrass versions of Led Zeppelin songs. I went, 'That sounds interesting.' Then one afternoon I went to the restroom, and I turned round and [Zeppelin singer] Robert Plant was using the stall next to me. What do you do in that scenario? So I got done with my business and ran out. Zach was outside, so I said [excited voice], 'Robert Plant is in the bathroom!' And then Robert comes out and Zach did not skip a beat. He flipped his phone and went, 'Hey Robert, can we have a picture with you?' And he looked at both us and went, 'Sure, mate.' That would not have happened if I'd interrupted him mid-flow."

I CRINGE A LITTLE BIT AT THE WORD 'FAME'

"I'm not a celebrity. I'm famous for two hours a night, which is when I'm up onstage. People ask me, 'What is success? What does success mean to you?' Success is knowing that what this band does ▶

"ROCK'N'ROLL WAS THE DEVIL WHEN I WAS GROWING UP"

Brent Smith: will avert his eyes in a studio loo

Brent is famous for two hours a night; he's fine with that

"I NEVER DRANK AND DID DRUGS TO HAVE A GOOD TIME, I DID THEM TO FALL DOWN"

matters to all of those people in the audience. They're the ones who decide whether you're successful or not."

I WANT TO EMPOWER PEOPLE

"I know what it feels like to be told, 'You're not going to make it, you're not capable of doing that.' People are so much stronger than they give themselves credit for. The world can be a tricky place to navigate, you've just got to believe in yourself."

COLLECTING THINGS IS FOR OTHER PEOPLE

"I'm a true minimalist, to a tee. I have two bags that are mine, and that's it. I don't even own a home. I live in hotels. If I collect anything, it's airline and hotel points."

I WOULDN'T CHANGE ANYTHING ABOUT MYSELF

"That sounds like a conceited awful bastard thing to say. But we're all on our own journey. If I changed anything about myself, I wouldn't know what the journey was meant to be."

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE DIE

"I love Keanu Reeves' answer. [TV host] Stephen Colbert asked him, 'What do you think happens after we die?' And Keanu goes, 'I know that the ones that love us will miss us.' Which is a very Keanu Reeves answer."

I CAN IMAGINE DOING THIS WHEN I'M 70

"Or 75 or 80 or 105. As long as I have air in my lungs and I'm capable of doing it, I'll do it."

HUMAN BEINGS ARE COMPLICATED

"That's an understatement. I choose to see the good in people at all times. I already know where the evil stems from, I know what it looks like. I do believe we want to help one another, we want to see each other flourish, we want to see each other survive. But we also have to realise we need to stop being so selfish as well. We all occupy this planet together – we need to figure out a way to work with one another."

HAPPINESS IS BEING WITH MY FAMILY

"Just being able to take care of them and make sure they're all good. It's that simple."

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Johan Hegg: putting his back into it

IN THE STUDIO

AMON AMARTH

Raise your horns! The Viking metal chieftains are ramping up the aggression on album number 12

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: KEVIN NIXON/TWIN V

AMON AMARTH'S TOUR in support of 2019's *Berserker* album was cut short by the pandemic, though that doesn't mean they've spent the last two years twiddling their thumbs. The longships reappeared in February when the Swedish icons released the single *Put Your Back Into The Oar*, and they're now hard at work on album 12 with producer Andy Sneap. We held an axe to the throat of singer Johan Hegg, to get him to spill the beans.

Amon Amarth have a signature sound: melodic death metal themed around Vikings. Will the new album tap into that once again?
"In many aspects, there are songs on this album that are darker and a bit more brutal than anything we've done in a long time. But you're going to hear that it's Amon Amarth, and there are a lot of really strong melodies and hooks in there. It's gonna be interesting to see what the fans think; personally, I love it. It's the direction I wish our previous album had taken."

Are the lyrics darker as well?
"It's possible. I write the lyrics, and I write the ideas that I get from the music. I would say that, musically, probably a lot of frustration and anger goes into the writing. The lyrics are going to reflect that in one way or another."

THE FACTS:

ALBUM:
12

PRODUCER:
Andy Sneap

STUDIO:
Backstage Recording Studios, Derby

SOUNDS LIKE:
AA's signature brand of Viking-loving melo-death – just darker and heavier

To what extent did the pandemic drive that frustration?
"I actually welcomed the pandemic. I wanted to have some time off for a while, because it was relentless touring. The first year of the pandemic, I was basically not doing anything. I think for other members of the band it was a different situation. It's not really something we've talked too much about, but I can imagine some people being a little bit more frustrated about not being able to tour than I was."

Are there any standout moments on this album that you can't wait for the fans to hear?
"I can think of three or four off the top of my head. There are some songs that I feel are close to my heart because of the lyrics. The last song of the album has a melancholic, sombre tone. It's a bit more reflective and it's going to be interesting to see what people take away from it."

***Put Your Back Into The Oar* won't appear on the new album. Why not?**
"It was supposed to come out a bit earlier, one of those Covid releases, just to do something while we were working on the album. We wanted to put something out there for the fans to let them know that we're still around."

That track's inspired by the Viking rowing that happens at Amon Amarth shows. What's the best example you've seen of that?
"The first one was Bloodstock in 2009. That was basically people sitting in line and 'rowing' through the field. I think one of the best ones we've got is on our live DVD, *The Pursuit Of Vikings*, from Summer Breeze Open Air [in 2017]. Thousands of people just sat down and rowed!"

Do you ever get sick of writing lyrics about Vikings?
"It depends. I was working on lyrics for one of the songs on this album and I was like, 'This really sounds familiar.' Then I realised it was basically the same story I'd written for another song on another album, just in a different way. When you write about mythology and history, obviously a lot of stuff is going to sound the same, but that was just too close. I had to start over."

What kind of timeline can you give us for the new album?
"It's somewhere on the horizon. That's pretty much all I can say. The goal is to have it out this year, but with the pandemic situation, you never know."

You've got a UK tour with Machine Head in September. Will we hear new songs from you on that run?
"Yeah, I'm sure we will toss some in there. It's gonna be a great tour!" H

AMON AMARTH'S NEW ALBUM WILL BE RELEASED LATER THIS YEAR VIA METAL BLADE

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THE STORY BEHIND

HEAD LIKE A HOLE
NINE INCH NAILS

The industrial-metal classic that launched one of the most influential bands of the 90s, and turned former studio janitor Trent Reznor into a generational figurehead

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURE: BRIAN RASIC/GETTY

TRENT REZNOR WAS working as an assistant engineer, janitor and all-round dogsbody at Right Track Studios in Cleveland, Ohio when he wrote and recorded the song that would put Nine Inch Nails on the map. That track, *Head Like A Hole*, would hit the sweet spot between the confrontational industrial noise of Ministry and Depeche Mode's stadium-sized electronic pop, turning the man who wrote it into the dark prince of early 90s alt-rock.

Trent had put in time as a keyboard player in local synth-pop groups The Innocent, Exotic Birds and Slam Bamboo, but he longed to create something more personal and reflective of his current mindset. He asked his boss, studio owner Bart Koster, if he could use the downtime between other bands' sessions to work on his own material. Bart, spotting his employee's potential, agreed.

"I reached the point in my life where I either needed to do this or do something else," Trent told *Scene Magazine* of the birth of what would become Nine Inch Nails. "I wanted to be a musician. I had an idea of what I wanted to do with my life, but I had not put the work into it to get to that stage. For me, the whole project was an experiment to see what would happen if I focused all my energy into one thing: put my life out of balance and just work on it. That involved starting to write songs. I think I'd always been kind of afraid because if they were terrible, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself."

For all his determination to make his own music, exactly what shape it would take was still a little fuzzy when he began recording demos in 1988. "I didn't have a focused idea of what the project was going to be," he later admitted. "It was basically me with the computer, coming up with different ideas, bits of songs. After a couple were written I realised the strength of this material was its emotional intensity. It was emotion-based, rather than technique-based."

Initially, he didn't think these aggressive electronic songs he was writing would ever be played live. That changed when he got a chance to open up for industrial linchpins Skinny Puppy on their US tour, assembling a band specifically for the shows. By that point, he'd already amassed several of the songs that would appear on NIN's debut album, *Pretty Hate Machine*, although *Head Like A Hole* wasn't among them.

"It was a somewhat bad experience," he later said of the tour. "In a lot of ways I was restricted because of the arrangement. So I got rid of the band I had and wrote some new songs."

One of these new tracks was *Head Like A Hole*. Ironically, for a song that would prove to be so pivotal, it was almost an afterthought, spat out with uncharacteristic speed.

"I wrote it at the last minute as a throwaway," he said in 2005. "The rest of *Pretty Hate Machine* was already written, and we'd revised everything else about nine times. Up until then songwriting had been a meticulous and agonising process, but this took me 15 minutes in my bedroom."

That urgency fed into the song, with a whirring electronic pulse giving a sense of relentless forward motion, only interrupted by an explosive chorus. As with all the other songs that would end up on *Pretty Hate Machine*, Trent played everything on *Head Like A Hole*. Just like his idol Prince, he was reluctant to let anyone else possibly dilute his vision.

"There really isn't room for collaboration when you're trying to express very personal feelings and internal angst," he told *Propaganda* magazine in 1990. "Collaboration leads to compromise, which can only water down the impact. What would a Van Gogh be worth, artistically, if he had other artists dabbing their paint brushes on his canvas?"

Despite that, he admitted that he didn't always believe in his own abilities as a songwriter and a musician. "I'd spend time at night learning how to record and engineer things and I tried to work out how my voice sounded," he said. "I was playing everything myself, but I had no confidence in playing guitar. I was convinced that if any real players heard it, they'd laugh. Now I know that's bullshit, but at the time I was very insecure."

THE FACTS

RELEASED: March 22, 1990

ALBUM: *Pretty Hate Machine*

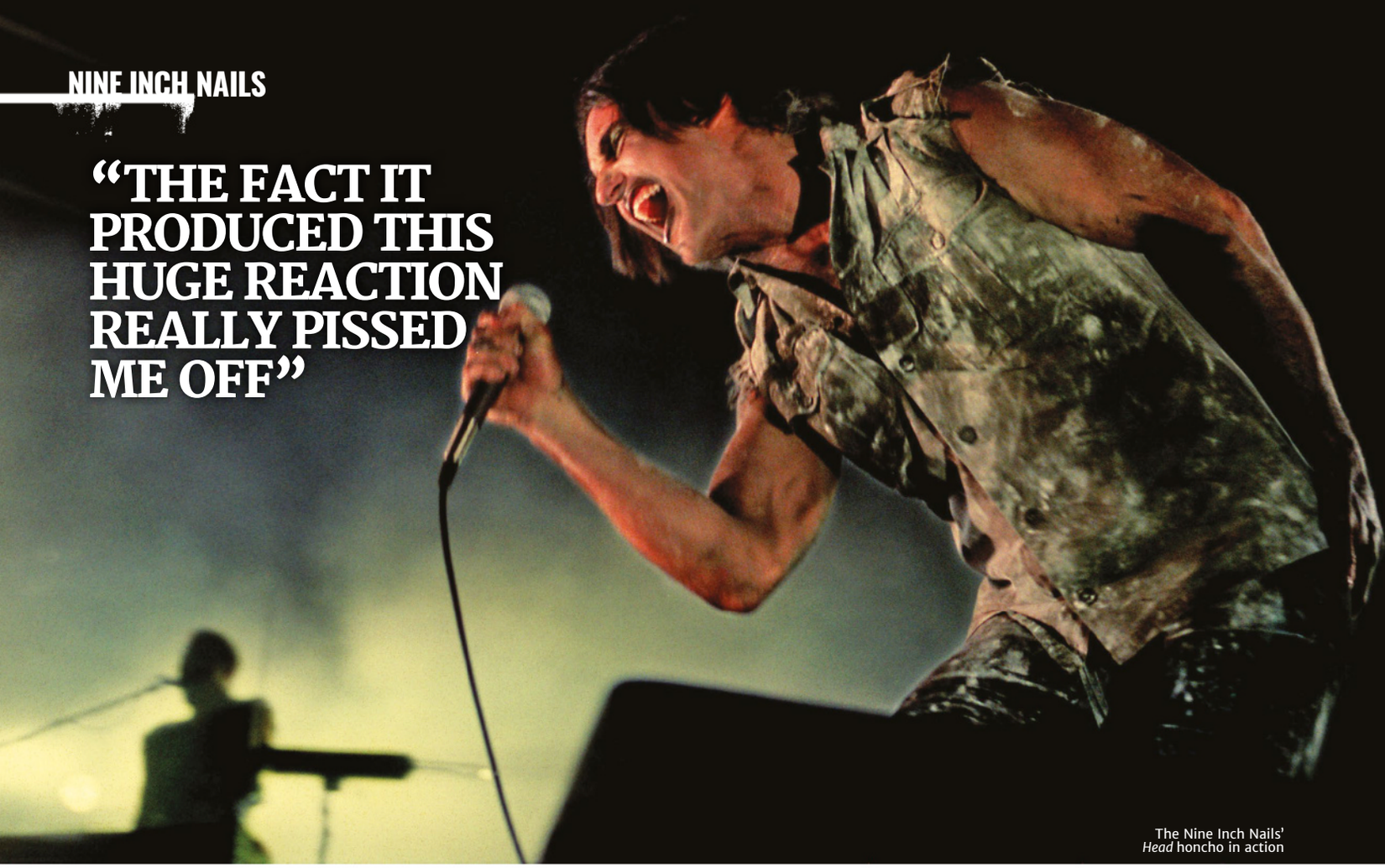
PERSONNEL: Trent Reznor

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: 45

Trent performed the song covered in mud during their infamous Woodstock 1994 set

“I DIDN’T HAVE A FOCUSED IDEA OF WHAT NINE INCH NAILS WAS GOING TO BE”

"THE FACT IT PRODUCED THIS HUGE REACTION REALLY PISSED ME OFF"



The Nine Inch Nails' *Head* honcho in action

Lyrically, *Head Like A Hole* was an all-purpose blast of rage and cynicism directed at the overriding power of money in modern society and the people whose lives are ruled by it. '*Bow down before the one you serve*,' sneered the singer. '*You're going to get what you deserve*.'

"I don't remember what I was thinking about at the time," he later said of the song's subject matter, "but it was pretty much about yelling at a beast without putting a face to it."

WRITING THE SONGS for *Pretty Hate Machine* turned out to be slightly less arduous than actually making it. Trent's first choice of producer was Mark 'Flood' Ellis, the British studio wizard who had worked with New Order, Ministry and British synth-pop duo Erasure. But Flood was still finishing up Depeche Mode's *Violator* album when NIN entered the studio to begin work on their debut.

"Flood was originally going to do the whole album, but his schedule didn't permit it," Trent recalled. "So I ended up in four different studios with four different guys mixing it. I spent a lot of time editing, picking parts of different mixes and splicing them together to give the impression of continuity."

By the time Flood was eventually free to hook up with the band, *Head Like A Hole* was one of only two songs left for him to produce. Where other tracks on the album leaned into the frontman's synth-pop background, albeit in much darker, bleaker fashion, *Head Like A Hole* was a burst of nihilistic energy that had more in common with metal than the Pet Shop Boys.

Pretty Hate Machine was released in October 1989 on US independent label TVT, with *Head Like A Hole* as its opening track. The label were unhappy that the finished product was way darker and more aggressive than the early demos they'd heard. According to Trent Reznor, TVT boss Steve Gottlieb called the album "an abortion", adding: "You fucked up what could have been a good career" (something Steve has since denied). In turn, Trent accused TVT of trying to bury the album.

Despite the tensions, *Head Like A Hole* was released as a single on March 22, 1990 (the 11-track US maxi-single version featured four different remixes of the song, with a longer running time than its parent album). It was accompanied by a striking video that juxtaposed a barrage of stroboscopic images with live footage of a mini-dreadlocked Trent leading NIN through an intense performance of the song – too intense at times.

"I had just bought my new little amp," NIN live guitarist Richard Patrick later said of the video shoot, "and Trent was trying to knock it over. You can see me holding it up with my butt, trying to hold it up, and Trent was pissed. He was like, 'Dude, let it fall over!' I'm like, 'But I just bought this thing. I just spent $600 on this, man.' He said, 'We're making a fuckin' video, Rich.' I'm like, 'I know, but I had to ask my mom for 600 bucks. I don't have 600 bucks.'"

This weird electronic-rock hybrid by an unknown band from Cleveland, Ohio picked up a surprising amount of radio and MTV play in the US, while press support in the UK helped it eventually breach the Top 50. Nine Inch Nails also found an unlikely cheerleader in Axl Rose, who invited the band to open for Guns N' Roses on their 1991 European stadium tour, but it was their appearance on that year's inaugural Lollapalooza tour that helped place NIN front and centre in the alternative rock boom.

Pretty Hate Machine would go on to sell three million copies in the US alone, setting up Trent Reznor as a reluctant figurehead for a generation of angsty, awkward kids. *Head Like A Hole* itself became a landmark song for Nine Inch Nails and the industrial genre. It's been covered by everyone from Korn and AFI to Miley Cyrus, who performed her tongue-in-cheek version, renamed *On A Roll*, in an episode of the Netflix series *Black Mirror*.

And what does the ex-studio janitor who wrote the song think about it? "The fact that it produced this huge reaction really pissed me off," he later grumbled, "because I hadn't agonised over it." There's just no pleasing some people.

RICK LOOMIS/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY

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IT'S ABOUT TIME!

…and other things you had to say on Meshuggah getting a *Metal Hammer* cover, Machine Gun Kelly and much more

Meshuggah: at home with *Hammer*

SHUGGAH SWEET

FINALLY we get to see Meshuggah on the cover of *Metal Hammer* right where they f**king belong! It's about time, *Metal Hammer*! And *Immutable* is amazing!
Ryan Dore, Facebook

Stop shouting, Ryan! No, you're right really – Meshuggah are one of the most singularly important metal bands of the last two decades. On the cover of *Hammer* is where they belong.

SHUGGAH SUITE

Haven't bought *Hammer* for a while but immediately went out to get the Meshuggah cover, which is gonna be framed alongside my album posters. Thanks, *Metal Hammer*!
James Greenwell (email)

Enjoy! Oh, and pick up our magazine more often! And then enjoy it again! Go on!

Bill Bailey: legend

ROBBIN GOOD

Can't say I'm surprised that Robb Flynn did an amazing job interviewing Meshuggah. You guys should give him a job!
James Craig, Facebook

He smashed it alright (as did all our special interviewers for last month's issue). We suspect he might already have a day job he needs to pay attention to, though.

WAR DRUMS

Just when I didn't think Bill Bailey could be any more of a legend, he pops up to interview Warduna?! Love him, what a great interview they had as well.
Deborah Harden, Facebook

Right?! Bill is now a prog-loving, metal-loving, Sonisphere-playing, Golden Gods-hosting, Golden Gods-*winning*, Wardruna-interviewing legend! Oh, and we hear he's quite good at stand-up, too.

WAR-BOO-NA

I don't hate Wardruna but for an 'Innovators' issue might it have been better to have an innovator that actually innovated heavy metal? Just a thought.
Jack Seagersen, Facebook

There's always one.

KILLER CUT

I read that last month's Killswitch Engage cover was the first time they've ever been on the cover of *Metal Hammer*. That can't be right! Please clear this up, I refuse to believe such a legendary band never got a cover before.
Ruth Engage, email

It's true! Sometimes the stars just don't quite align right, but Killswitch Engage have finally had their (long overdue) moment in the sun. Or on a lower shelf in a WH Smith's somewhere, anyway.

JUSTINE CREDIBLE

I have to say I wasn't familiar with Employed To Serve, but after reading Justine's interview with Killswitch Engage in the last issue, I checked them out, and am so glad I did. Great band!
Scott Edwards, email

#TWEETS

I'm Smackin the Shit outta the next MF that asks me about the Oscars…
Ice T (@FINALLEVEL)

Feeling BLEGHssed
Chris Cerulli, Motionless In White (@ChrisMotionless)

When I first saw the trailer for *The Northman*, I was like, "this is *Black Panther* for white people", and I can't wait to see it.
Doc Coyle, Bad Wolves (@DocCoyle)

Are you more bad than good?
Spencer Charnas, Ice Nine Kills (@spencerink)

Woke up today, first thing I did was listen to Lamb of God/Megadeth *Wake Up Dead*. Absolutely blew my mind, two of the greatest metal bands alive.
Jeff Kendrick, ex-Devildriver (@jeffkendrick)

PRESS

Kreator: richly deserving *Hammer* cover stars

Where have you been, Scott?! Just kidding – welcome to the party. *Conquering* was one of the best albums of 2021 and we know the sky's the limit for Employed To Serve. Turns out Justine's a swell interviewer, too!

KREATE YOUR OWN FUTURE

Kreator have long been my favourite thrash band and I'd always hoped they'd eventually make magazine covers in the UK. How richly deserved, and what a fantastic job Mark from Alter Bridge did with the interview. Can we have a Testament cover next?
Graham Platt, email

Kreator on a heavy metal magazine cover just feels right, doesn't it? And we can't lie: Testament being on the cover would be pretty swell too. You never know what the future holds.

MACHINE GUN SMELLY

Enough with the Machine Gun Kelly coverage on the websites, please. I don't care how many shit System Of A Down covers he does: he's not a rock star.
Chris Atkinson, email

Hey, you stop clicking and we'll stop posting! (Alright, alright, we get it. But you can't deny he's a character that will always provoke an opinion. Right?)

BIG DEBATE

The legendary King Diamond gave us the definitive say on the 'did Ghost rip off Mercyful Fate' debate, giving us a resounding 'NO' on the issue. He'd know best, after all.

HE SAID

"Some people have compared the two bands, but I never thought that. I very much saw them as a Blue Öyster Cult-style band. I'm sure they have a little influence from us, and that's a huge honour to hear, but they have their own style. I never felt that they were copying us. We have all these guitar solos, and they barely use any guitar solos on those first couple of albums."

YOU SAY

I get what King's saying but it's ridiculous to suggest there's no similarity at all. Tobias Forge would be the first to admit the influence, I'm sure.
Damon Smith, Facebook

They've never sounded remotely like Merycful Fate but I can definitely hear BÖC in there.
Russell Bloor, Facebook

I've always described them as a cross between BÖC and Abba with a little Mercyful Fate thrown in.
Johnny Trevino, Facebook

Now the trve metal turds can shut up. If any of them actually sat down and listened to Ghost they'd realise they have never sounded remotely like Mercyful Fate or King Diamond. Even the face paint was never the same.
Joseph Ellis, Facebook

Ghost have their own unique sound. I like the way I can hear influence from older bands within newer music anyway. That doesn't make it a copy of anything. It's more like a tribute to the great bands of past decades.
Casey Richard, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

HALESTORM
Back From The Dead
"The rallying cry we all needed after the last two years"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

WATAIN
The Agony & Ecstasy Of Watain
"An exhaustive, exultant razing of consciousness"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

HALESTORM
Back From The Dead
"Bloody love Lzzy. This album's a corker, too"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAMMSTEIN
Zeit
"Contemplative, yet quintessential Rammstein. They never disappoint"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

RAMMSTEIN
Zeit
"Just when you think Rammstein are maturing, they drop a song called *Dicke Titten*."
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

DEF LEPPARD
Diamond Star Halo
"Stand aside, Tobias Forge. The daddies of pop-metal are back"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

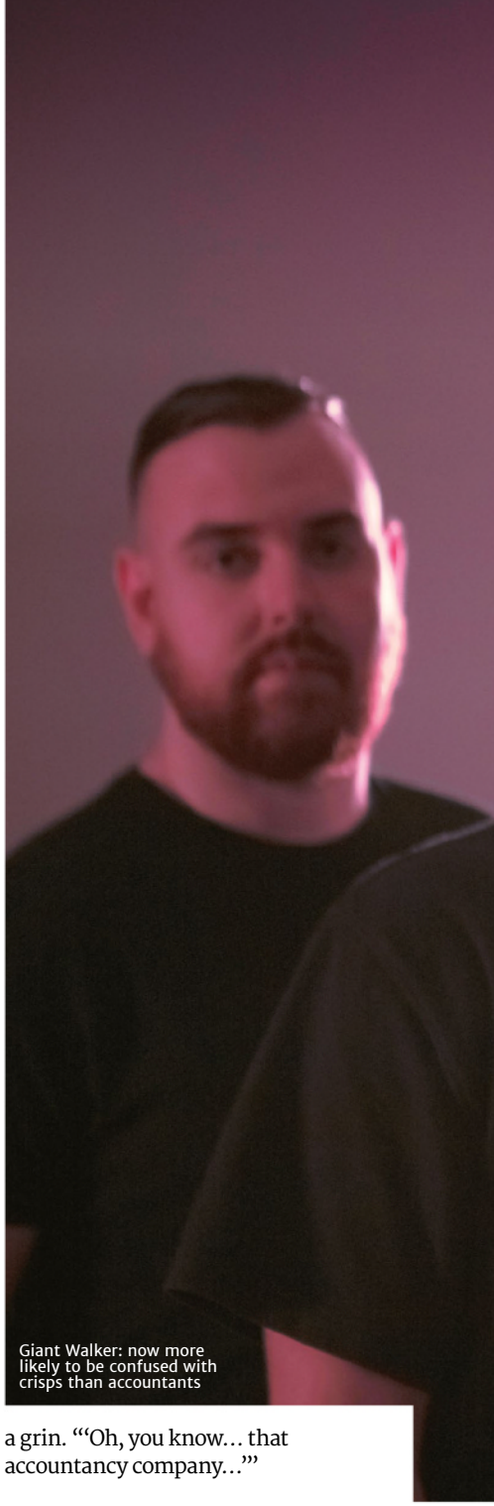
ZEAL & ARDOR
Zeal & Ardor
"Originally conceived as a joke, this album is anything but"
PAUL BRANNIGAN
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

NEW NOISE

GIANT WALKER

UK prog metal's next big thing prove that some good stuff did manage to come out of the pandemic

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS



Giant Walker: now more likely to be confused with crisps than accountants

"EVERYONE IS SO quick to make everything black and white, but I think grey is always more interesting," says Giant Walker vocalist and lyricist Steff Fish, when asked to explain her band's nuanced approach to songwriting.

Her bandmate, guitarist Jamie Southern, picks up the thread. "The last thing the world needs is another love song. I don't think any of us like anything that's kind of like… 'Bleugh… this is how I feel, eat it.'"

Listen to Giant Walker's debut album, *All In Good Time*, and that aversion to anything too straightforward makes perfect sense. The Geordies' take on prog metal ebbs and flows. Songs start out on solid ground before reaching their apex in a different dimension and surprisingly agile grooves turn on a hairpin at a moment's notice, buoyed by unpredictable time signatures. By the time latest single *Katoomba* reaches its first chorus, the song has shifted on its axis three times, anchored by Steff's clarion-clear, cathartic vocal melodies. Citing influences as wide-ranging as Deftones, Karnivool, Soundgarden and Radiohead, it's a sound that's tricky to pin down.

"I like art that makes me think a little bit more," Steff continues. "Lyrics that have multiple concepts and ideas. [Recent single] *Past The Peak* started off as being about an article I read, about a woman who ended up addicted to painkillers for a knee injury. But it morphed into being about how, quite often as humans, we tend to try to paper over our issues with easier solutions when actually the problem is deeper."

The band, completed by drummer Alex Black and bassist Jordan Gregory, formed during lockdown in 2020, but the four of them have been making music together for years. Childhood friends Steff and Jamie met in their high school music class before getting together with Jordan at college and forming their first band, Xero, while Alex eventually joined the ranks when the quartet moved down south to study at London's Academy of Contemporary Music.

"We came up with the name in college before we knew there was an accountancy company called Xero and about a million other bands also called Xero," he chuckles (including the first version of Linkin Park – History Ed). "You can always tell when you're not comfortable in your own skin."

When Covid hit and the band, like many of their peers, found themselves contemplating the viability of their artistic future, the period of reflection provided an opportunity for them to rebrand. Jamie continues: "It's not a good sign when you're really passionate about the music but when people are like, 'What band are you in?' You're like…" He cringes through a grin. "'Oh, you know… that accountancy company…'"

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Knotty prog metal that offers pure catharsis

FOR FANS OF: Karnivool, Black Orchid Empire, Tesseract

LISTEN TO: *Past The Peak*

***ALL IN GOOD** Time* is very much a product of the pandemic. In early 2020, Alex moved back home to Newcastle, leaving his bandmates in Guildford, and as a result the album was written remotely over the course of multiple lockdowns, with songs pieced together via files shared back and forth online.

"I knew I would put a lot of strain on the band, but actually what came out of it was the best scenario," reveals Alex of his decision to relocate. "We fully embraced technology and had weekly Zooms, and it really wasn't as big a deal as I thought it would be."

By late 2020 the band had been contacted by Chris Coulter, the producer best known for excavating the glitchy, progressive intricacies of ex-post-hardcore visionaries Arcane Roots, who invited them down to The Ranch studios in Southampton to work

KATOOMBA/PRESS

on the song that would become recent single, *Katoomba*. The sessions went so well, the band asked him to produce the rest of their debut.

"We're still proud of the songs we did as Xero, but they were rushed; there was always a compromise," says Jamie. "This was the first time we were like, 'We're going to spend the time. We're going to get the right producer and invest in it.' I knew we were in good hands. It was just a case of, 'OK, I need to perform.'"

The resulting record, which was recorded in early 2021 at London's Stakeout studios, is a confident, fully realised statement that certainly doesn't sound like the opening gambit from a band less than two years old – never mind one who, due to lockdowns, have only played one gig to date. While most bands cut their teeth live before heading into the studio, the circumstances of the last two years meant Giant Walker had an album's worth of untested material ready to go before they even stepped onstage under their new moniker.

"I found it really gratifying to know that the songs translated live because we'd never heard them played in a room before," says Jamie, remembering the jitters surrounding their first show, in a packed room at Aldershot's West End Centre, and how the crowd enthusiastically embraced the new music. Now, with their first official UK tour coming up in June, we predict a lot more would-be fans are about to fall under Giant Walker's hypnotic spell.

"People are more invested in this than in previous projects," smiles Jamie when *Hammer* suggests their story is only just beginning. "This album will be something I can look back on in 20, 30 years and be like, 'This holds up, I'm still really proud of it.'" H

"WE TRY TO PAPER OVER OUR ISSUES WITH EASIER SOLUTIONS WHEN ACTUALLY THE PROBLEM IS DEEPER"
STEFF FISH

***ALL IN GOOD TIME* IS OUT ON MAY 13. GIANT WALKER TOUR THE UK IN JUNE**

NEW NOISE

SICKSENSE

Stuck Mojo and The Agonist alumni hoist the old-school nu metal flag high

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Sicksense bring the new back to nu metal

GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHEN members of established bands get together to play the music of their youth, the results are either the rhythmic riffing of 70s rock or furious 80s-style hardcore punk. But Sicksense – formed by members of Stuck Mojo and The Agonist – have their eyes on a much more recent musical trend: nu metal.

"Nu metal is truly a limitless genre," reasons Rob 'The Ripper' Fonts, singer with Stuck Mojo and one half of Sicksense's vocal offering. "I believe hip hop elements add a certain aggression and bounce to the style that works with metal music when executed correctly."

"We all have a background and experience with the more extreme side of metal, so returning to nu metal is fun," adds co-vocalist Killer V, aka The Agonist's Vicky Psarakis. "The music is light-hearted and kind of sparks that teenage nostalgia inside us, but we're working with the experience we've gained throughout the years."

With their debut EP *Kings Today*, Sicksense are calling back to the sense of heft and the anthemic qualities that made nu metal a turn-of-the-millennium commercial powerhouse. But this isn't mindless nostalgia; it's a reflection of the times.

"Nowadays, music in the pop and hip hop worlds seems to be incorporating industrial and heavy music elements," Rob says. "Take artists like Mimi Barks, ZillaKami and Ghostemane. It's a fitting time for nu metal to be making a comeback and hopefully it'll start to reach mainstream audiences again too."

Freaks with riffs at the top of the charts again? About time.

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Now That's What I Call Nu Metal Vol.27

FOR FANS OF: Korn, Otep, Once Human

LISTEN TO: *Make Believe*

***KINGS TODAY* IS OUT NOW**

Ianai are all about the mystery – up to a point

IANAI

Otherworldly pagan-folk from not-so-secretive multi-national collective

WORDS: MATT MILLS

IANAI WANT TO BE a faceless folk project. The problem is that they're not very good at anonymity. In their marketing materials, they claim to be the solo venture of a figure called Trevenial: a quasi-mortal multi-instrumentalist. When *Hammer* requests an interview, the message comes back that Trevenial "does not speak any human language," so it's best to chat with their "backing band".

Even though they're speaking via email, Ianai instantly spill the beans. They're composed of Swallow The Sun keyboardist/singer Jaani Peuhu, Nicole Thomas of London synthpoppers Client, and Bulgarian artist Cvetan Hadzhiyski. Jaani seems to be the nucleus of the outfit. It was his Helsinki studio that they recorded their new debut album *Sunir* in, and his pipes that hum the graceful melodies of its 12 songs.

"I had never been interested in this kind of music at all," he says, "but just found myself working in this new world. The amount of instruments and voices on each song is insane. At the same time, this was the easiest and most important album I've ever worked on; it's music with musicians from all around the world."

Despite trading in traditional Nordic-style bliss, *Sunir* is strewn with cameos from high-profile rock stars. Members of HIM, Massive Attack, Sisters Of Mercy and The Rasmus all materialise, yet the band are hesitant to delve into specifics. "None of the musicians are there for their status, more the skills that have made them well-known," says Jaani.

Of the project's future, Cvetan states, "The next step is understanding the concept for future live performances. We imagine a theatrical audiovisual experience more than just a concert. So, there is still a lot of work to be done."

More work than they put into being anonymous, we can only hope.

IN SHORT:

SOUNDS LIKE: Delicate Scandinavian neo-folk with all the ambition and grandeur of heavy metal

FOR FANS OF: Wardruna, Mercury Circle, Forndom

LISTEN TO: *Savoj Icoil*

***SUNIR* IS OUT ON JUNE 10 VIA SVART**

PRESS

I AM THE NIGHT

Black metal majesty from Omnium Gatherum guitarist

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURE: TERHI YLIMÄINEN

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Prime mid-90s black metal in all its frozen glory updated for today

FOR FANS OF:
Emperor, Mayhem, Omnium Gatherum

LISTEN TO:
Ode To The Nightsky

BLACK BLOOD HAS been bubbling in Markus Vanhala's veins for years. As his regular bands Omnium Gatherum and Insomnium slipped ever closer to more melodic territory in recent years, the Finnish guitarist found himself drawn towards the epic black metal he listened to as a youth. The result is his obsidian-hued new band, I Am The Night, whose debut album, *While The Gods Are Sleeping*, evokes such second-wave black metal icons as Emperor, Dissection and *Bergtatt*-era Ulver.

"I had a darker-than-black vision for the music and the lyrics," says Markus of frostbitten songs such as *Ode To The Nightsky* and *Holocaust Of The Angels*. "The pandemic was the perfect time to turn this into flesh. When everything else fails, forces of evil arise for a reason!"

A glare for the camera before a nice sauna

I Am The Night's period-accurate mix of icy guitars and epic keyboards was given extra realism when the remote studio they were using to record the album was hit by a huge, weekend-long blizzard. "It was a cool atmosphere to record some cold, northern blackened metal in," says Markus, before undercutting the ambience a bit: "We had a real Finnish sauna after every working day."

Their devotion to resurrecting the sound and feel of 90s black metal extends to the album's cover, illustrated by Kristian Wåhlin (the artist behind Emperor's *In The Nightside Eclipse*) and featuring a logo designed by Christophe Szpajdel of Dissection/Emperor fame. An exercise in nostalgia? Yes, it is.

"I wanted to make an album that young Markus Vanhala would've loved to listen back in 1995," he says. "But from some old ingredients, we've created something new."

***WHILE THE GODS ARE SLEEPING* IS OUT ON MAY 6 VIA SVART**

Fighting for freedom as noisily as possible

BURNER

South London extreme metallers rage against oppression and injustice

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Blasts of death metal mixed with the chaos of hardcore

FOR FANS OF:
Converge, Full Of Hell, Nails

LISTEN TO:
Ingsoc

"IT'S ABOUT CONNECTING with the things I'm afraid of, the things I'm angry about, and making something real out of that."

Burner vocalist Harry Nott is describing the impetus that drives his band. The South London outfit's 2021 single *Ingsoc* was dedicated to the persecuted Uyghur people in China, as well as the inhabitants of Hong Kong, Tibet and Taiwan; raging against oppression and injustice is a core part of their sound.

"A boot stamps a face forever," he says of their lyrical inspiration. "It's cliché, I know, but we live in that world. That stuff happens to people every day. We should be grateful that we live in a country where we have freedoms and we should use that power to protest."

Burner's hybrid of death metal and hardcore is the perfect delivery system. Current single *Rat King Crown* thrashes with Converge-esque fury, while *Siege Fire*, also from EP *A Vision Of The End*, is a firestorm of skewed time signatures.

"We wanted to express this message of urgency," says Harry. "It's important to say something unique because that struggle is not something we see addressed so much."

***A VISION OF THE END* IS OUT ON JUNE 17 VIA CHURCH ROAD**

BURNER: PRESS JERICHO: SPEEDY RUIZ/PRESS THE STRUTS: ANNA LEE/PRESS

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

THE STRUTS

"I love The Struts. They're a great band that bring that anthemic, good time, 70s rock'n'roll party vibe to an updated time and sound. I can see Fozzy touring with a band who bring that energy because there is a place for that. We encourage people to clap and chant along, and they do too. That's what it's all about to me – any band who make me come away from their show thinking, 'That was a lot of fun!' I'm going to dig. And The Struts are a hell of a lot of fun."

CHRIS JERICHO, FOZZY

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

SEPTICFLESH

MODERN PRIMITIVE VINYL BOX SET

NUCLEAR BLAST

£50.40

SINCE RETURNING FROM the abyss with the flamboyant fury of *Communion*, Septicflesh have monopolised the world of symphonic black/death metal. Eleventh album *Modern Primitive* keeps that sound alive, delivering nine monolithic and string-powered tracks occasionally offset by luscious clean singing. By forking out for this box set, you get the album spread out across two pale purple vinyl discs. Three bonus tracks, including an orchestra-only take on centrepiece *Coming Storm*, are included. A CD version is in there as well, as are two art prints that delve deeper into the grey, gothic world Septicflesh frontman Seth Siro Anton paints with every release. A metal pin rounds out the bundle, which comes collected in an exclusive and spectacular-looking obsidian sleeve.

tinyurl.com/septic-box

ARÐ MEAD SET

£24.99–£36.99

After immersing yourself in Arð's deep, sorrowful doom epic about St Cuthbert's remains, a stiff drink'll be in order. This tie-in will work a treat, featuring a litre of artisanal mead and two gourds to glug from.

tinyurl.com/ard-meadset

METAL MASSACRE BUNDLE

£29.50

Pay fealty to the first instalment of the legendary *Metal Massacre* series, which turns 40 this year. Don a to-die-for tee and bang thy head to killer tracks by Bitch, Cirith Ungol and a protean 'Mettallica'.

tinyurl.com/massacre-bundle

STAR WARS DECAL

£2.99

Dark side. Light side. Like the Force, but, y'know… lightswitch, innit. What fun we have. Piss away the hours and flick to your heart's content with Master Yoda, Darth Vader and a galactic electricity bill.

tinyurl.com/force-switch

VENOM PRISON SKATE DECK

£49.95

What better band to soundtrack a snapped ankle, wrist or pelvis than Venom Prison? Get off your animus and start practising your ollie with this killer skateboard deck – a collab with the band's hometown skate shop, Freestyle.

tinyurl.com/venom-deck

THE LAST GIG BOARD GAME

£37.50–£126.00

A heavy metal game that isn't just Monopoly but louder? The Last Gig requires players to finish their respective bands' tours, using guitar picks as currency, vans as playable tokens and nearly 300 playable cards.

tinyurl.com/last-gig

UPON A BURNING BODY T-SHIRT

£18.30

These metalcore oiks could never be accused of subtlety, and this snake-emblazoned number tells friends and foes alike what they need to know: that, if you're wearing it, you're feeling pretty fucking hostile.

tinyurl.com/uabb-tee

DAEMON TAROT READING

£23.90

Psychics haven't had many walk-ins these past couple of years, so they've taken to pondering orbs online. Get matched with your patron demon, angel or [insert deity here], all in a handy PDF format. Evil.

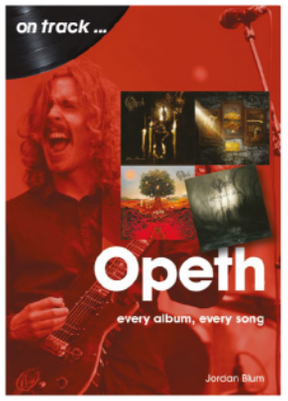
tinyurl.com/daemon-tarot

HALESTORM T-SHIRT

£28.99

Halestorm's hugest, heaviest album yet is a cause for celebration, and this smart, striking red-on-black shirt makes almost as big a statement as the full-bore rawk that Lzzy Hale and co peddle.

tinyurl.com/halestorm-tee



OPETH BOOK

£15.99

Opeth don't do death metal anymore. If you stop crying for just one minute, you can read about all the times they did; Jordan Blum's *On Track* entry dissects every Opeth song in painstaking detail.

tinyurl.com/opeth-book

THE BATMAN POSTER

£6.99

Tear down your posters of glittery vampires, throw away your sailor-related fanfiction, kill the spare and embrace Bat-Patz on your bedroom door. Squint a little, and he just looks like a member of 3Teeth.

tinyurl.com/bat-print

STREET FIGHTER POSTERS

£81.20

They'll set you back 80 quid, but you're getting 16 high-quality, glossed-up Street Fighter portraits – pixelated as your halcyon nostalgia suggests. Better get yourself down IKEA and bulk-buy those 8 x 10-inch frames, too.

tinyurl.com/turbo-posters

STOMPER CHAIN BOOTS

£53.99

These chunktastic, chain-emblazoned kicks are 100% vegan and look awesome too. Wear at the goth club, at the supermarket à la Dani Filth in a Bring Me The Horizon video, or just when hanging out with your animal mates.

tinyurl.com/stomper-chain

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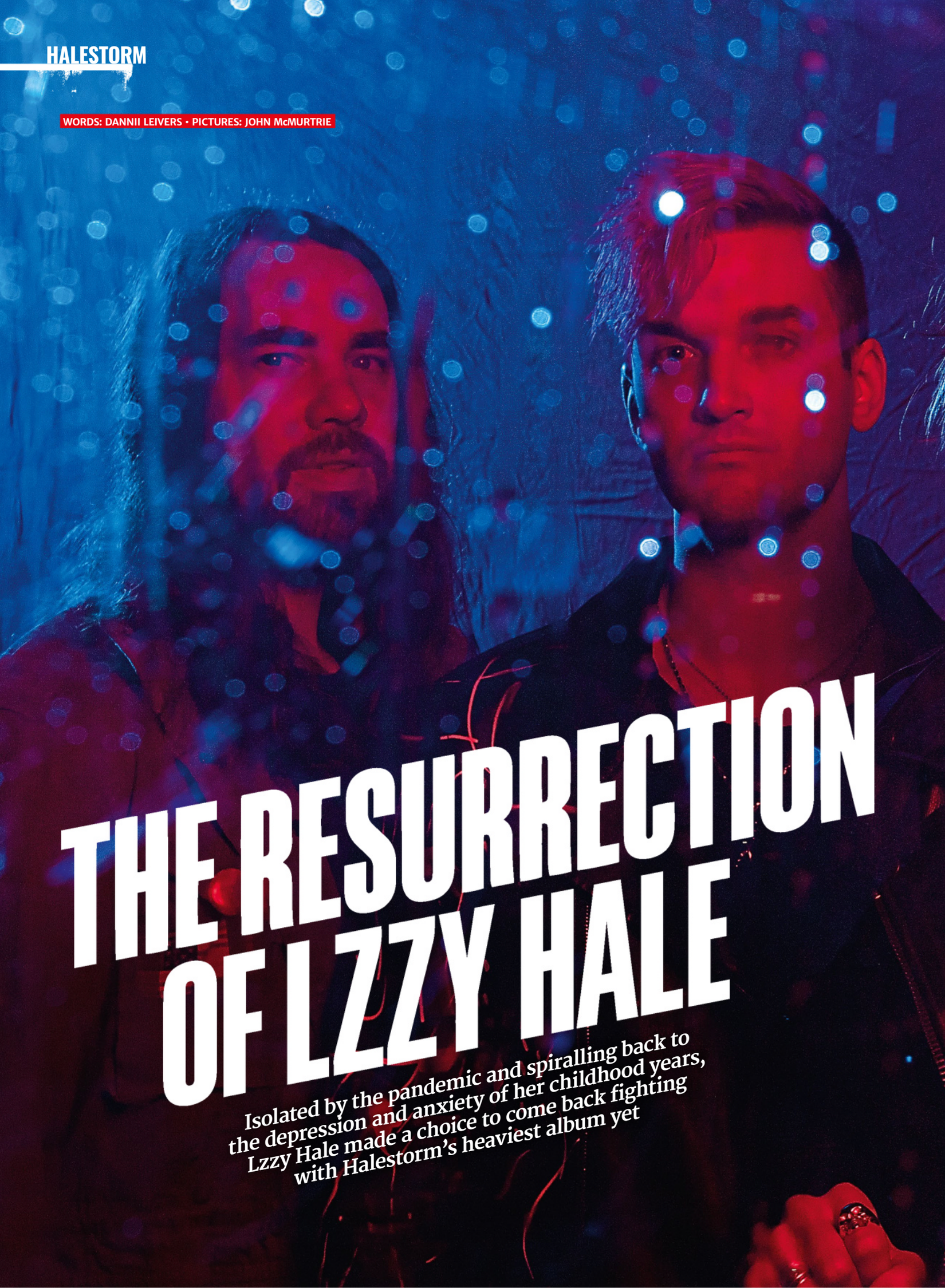
WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: JOHN McMURTRIE



THE RESURRECTION OF LZZY HALE

Isolated by the pandemic and spiralling back to the depression and anxiety of her childhood years, Lzzy Hale made a choice to come back fighting with Halestorm's heaviest album yet

Lzzy Hale learned about the power of using your voice when she was in the first grade. Although, back then, the firebrand rock singer was having none of it.

"We were having a fire drill and the teachers were trying to teach us that if you're hiding anywhere, if you're in a closet when there's a fire, you need to learn how to yell out for the firemen so they know you're in there." She chuckles at the irony. "Apparently, I wouldn't do it. Which is funny, because most of my career is built of yelling at this point."

To chalk up Lzzy's success to "yelling" is underselling it. Halestorm's no-frills, balls-to-the-wall hard rock is big, brash and accessible enough to court the mainstream, but it's Lzzy's gale-force, instantly recognisable howl and life-affirming lyrics that give the band their emotional heft and have marked them as one of heavy music's new guard, genuinely capable of filling arenas. Since Lzzy started the band, aged just 13, with her brother, drummer Arejay Hale, she's evolved into a modern rock icon: she's openly bisexual, an LGBTQ+ ally, a proud mental health champion, and a figurehead for a devoted fanbase who have adopted her songs as anthems of empowerment and resilience.

Today, she and her partner of 18 years – Halestorm guitarist Joe Hottinger – are visiting Joe's parents, each conducting their own press interviews for the band's triumphant fifth album, *Back From The Dead*. Of the two, Lzzy got the better deal: while she chats to us via Zoom from a sun-drenched balcony, Joe is cooped up inside in the next room. She seems relaxed and happy. With her bleached blonde hair tied into a messy ponytail, her eyes shaded by oversized sunglasses, she oozes an effortless star quality and is eager to chat about the new record, which candidly charts the emotional highs and lows of her pandemic experience.

She tells the fire drill story to illustrate how "painfully shy" she was as a child. When she was 11 or 12 years old, she began suffering from intense panic attacks in the middle of class. Scared, and unsure what was happening, her teachers sent her home from school – although depression and anxiety had run in her family for years, it wouldn't be until years later that she recognised her symptoms for what they really were. Life changed in the eighth grade, as she reached her teen years. By that point she had discovered heavy rock, watching videos of Dio and Pat Benatar that had lit a fire under her imagination, and she and her brother had broken out of the basement of their family home to play gigs at local shopping malls. Looking back, Lzzy describes those early performances as a "trial by fire", a battle between the far-off dreams of a young teen and a reality grounded in anxiety. "The more I was forced to be onstage, that want to perform overrode that fear," she says.

By 2019, Halestorm were enjoying their biggest year yet. The band, still riding high off the back of their last album, 2018's *Vicious*, had completed their first-ever UK arena tour, supported by In This Moment. They had been nominated for their second Grammy, Best Rock Performance, with their single *Uncomfortable*, having won the award in 2013 for the single *Love Bites (So Do I)*. And at the start of 2020, they were meeting at the Nashville home of Lzzy and Joe for regular jam sessions in the basement as they started working towards their fifth album.

When the pandemic hit, Lzzy was lulled into a false sense of security, initially seeing lockdown as an "interesting little adventure for us to get through, kind of like a snowed-in day". As Joe explains, Nashville "never actually closed down" but he and Lzzy hibernated at home. Having spent the last 17 years pretty much constantly on the road, she relished the opportunity for some 'me' time. "It's really hard for me to do nothing," she explains. "When lockdown first

Facing the future: drummer Arejay Hale

Bassist Josh Smith sees the light

happened, I started using it as an excuse to *do* nothing. Everyone was delivering to your door, so I'm like, 'I'm gonna order pizza.' There was a brewery that delivered right to your door, so we'd get beer every week – a case of stuff. Like, 'This is awesome, just like a backstage party the whole time.'"

As we all now know, those first few weeks turned into months. For Halestorm, it was the longest they had gone without playing a gig or seeing each other. For Lzzy, the problem was much bigger than the band. It was the longest she had gone "without having a mission, a purpose". She realised the band had become "an extension of me, an extension of my personality".

"When I was left without this armour I had put on myself, all of a sudden I was vulnerable to all these things that I hadn't been vulnerable to for a long time," she explains. "I had to figure out how to deal with it without this 'Lzzy Hale' character.

"You start looking at yourself in a different light, and there was a side of me that I did get introduced to which I hadn't seen in a while. There was the juxtaposition of Lzzy Hale onstage, who is no longer really active right now…" She interjects with a throaty, self-deprecating chuckle. "Haha, please leave a message, she'll get back to you. And then there's the Elizabeth Hale who's been on the couch in her pyjamas for three days wondering what the future holds."

Questioning her self-worth as uncertainty stretched out in front of her, the anxiety that had plagued her in her youth started to creep up to the surface. "I was just like, 'Man, I have all these things I could accomplish, but I don't feel like doing anything," she explains. "I remember at one point Googling my thoughts and symptoms and being like, 'Oh my gosh, it's back.' At the time, I was like, 'Why is this happening now?' I suppose because I was out of my element for the first time in a long time."

"OUR RECORD IS A STORY OF SURVIVAL"

LZZY HALE

Lzzy describes the last two years as "a journey of rediscovery". When *Hammer* caught up with her right after the band had finished recording *Back From The Dead*, she said, "When I didn't have that outlet for music and I was missing the community of the live show, you realise you can't fill that hole with anything else. There was a period of time when we were all drinking too much or trying to fill the void with other things." She alludes to that a little more on the drolly upbeat *Back From The Dead* track, *Brightside*: '*Fake a smile and self-destruct… Everything, I'm choking on, is supposed to help, and keep me hanging on.*'

Today, when asked to elaborate, she takes a deep breath before answering carefully. "I got to know a little bit about myself. I don't know if I should call it addictive tendencies, but I know I can go there if I'm not careful. I don't think I would have realised that if we hadn't gone through that. If you don't have those responsibilities… that North Star that's the most important thing in your life… it's very easy to fall into those rabbit holes of… I keep calling it, 'I have a case of the fuck-its.' That can be dangerous."

Through it all, her rock was Joe, who she describes as the "angel" in their relationship. "He saw my demeanour change," she continues. "He saw me go from being this very confident, determined person to the complete opposite. I started worrying about silly things that I haven't worried

about in years, like worrying about the way I look or worrying about my future."

When we speak to the guitarist on a separate call, he agrees that the change in Lzzy was palpable and worrying. Keen not to speak on her behalf, while he refers to her pandemic experience as "a learning experience for both of us", he won't get into specifics. "I've known Lzzy for almost 20 years now, we're pretty in sync," he says, answering our questions while being accosted by his parents' two small dogs. Excited by the extra company in the house, they run in and out of camera shot, their tails swishing like mini feather dusters. "We communicate really well. We talk about things right away and don't let things build up; it's a constant discussion. All you can do is be there and be supportive and raise them up. Just do my best to support, and try to counter any destructive forces with creative forces."

Although Lzzy had already been going to therapy sessions before the pandemic, she "doubled down on that" as soon as she acknowledged what was happening to her. "It was really nice to have someone professional say, 'Hey, it's OK to feel these things. It doesn't mean you're broken or a bad person… it's just your body trying to deal with what's going on and these new old feelings.'"

At her lowest point, she had fallen out of love with making art. "I basically had to give myself a pep talk and be like, 'Alright Lzzy. I don't care if you like the songs that you write right now. Most likely, you're going to sit down and the first five or six are going to suck, and you're just going to have to deal with that, but you're going to feel a lot better if you get through it,'" she remembers. Yet, she worked through those emotions in the music. "All of these songs on this album are more or less from gibberish in all my journal entries, trying to write out my feelings and… almost try to recreate that happy place in my mind."

"WE HAVE A FULL ALBUM'S WORTH OF WEIRD B-SIDES"

LZZY HALE

In the end, though, it was music that pulled her through to the other side. In December 2020, the band headed back into Nashville's Rock Falcon Studio where, with producer Nick Raskulinecz, they spent 12 months masked up and plugged in. "We ended up being quite irresponsible the first times we were recording," laughs Lzzy. "We were so excited to be back together again, we weren't focusing on the songs, we were just jamming. So we have a full album's worth of B-sides that are really weird that didn't make it on the record."

Following 2018's *Vicious*, which was roundly criticised for being too polished, *Back From The Dead* is easily their heaviest album to date. "I didn't think about that until an interview the other day," admits Joe. "But you know, I think it's the most consistent and consistently rocking album we've done. Even the ballads have weight to them in their own way. We weren't thinking, 'Let's make it heavy.' We just tried to be our best selves. But we like hard rock, we like riffs."

Both Lzzy and Joe credit the album's title track, *Back From The Dead*, as the song that would come to define the record. It's an anthemic stomper – a hurricane of rising riffs and drums, the sound of a band forced into dormancy back doing what they do best, with the triumphant refrain: *'Back from the dead alive / Hell couldn't hold me / Back from the other side / Up from the dirt I rise.'* "We had all these songs written that were good, but we were questioning, 'Is this strong enough,

The band regrouped in December 2020, with producer Nick Raskulinecz

"IT GIVES ME CHILLS!"

Joe gives us his track-by-track guide to Halestorm's fifth album, *Back From The Dead*

BACK FROM THE DEAD
"We had it mixed and mastered. Then I played it on my phone, and it got to the solo, and I was like, 'Fuck! I fucked up.' Lzzy's ripping on there, we got to the solo and it... just... happened. The next day I was like, 'I'm going to redo that solo,' and so that's the one you hear. It's much better."

WICKED WAYS
"I love the aggression on this, it's nonstop and Lzzy does something she's never done before; that bridge, that triplet scream – almost like a decade-old angry emo moment, like, '*I GOT MY WI-CK-ED WAYS.*' There's so many great screams on it."

STRANGE GIRL
"One of the things we've been working on for years is trying to write music and songs that will reverberate in an arena properly. Big rock'n'roll. It's one of my favourite songs on there. I can't wait to play it live."

BRIGHTSIDE
"I love *Brightside*, it's so sarcastic. It's such a good moment when she says... '*But nobody likes you!*' It's a character and a perspective Lzzy doesn't discuss much."

THE STEEPLE
"It's right-up-the-middle rock'n'roll and it's great. Lzzy is just ripping. It's about the live show. We've played it live in the UK and it was so much fun."

TERRIBLE THINGS
"I think she did such a good job discussing a heavy subject without being preachy. We all do terrible things; it's not picking any sides, it's just saying, 'Good Lord, have some empathy.' It was the first time I finger-picked on acoustic through a whole song. We had this basic song with some acoustics and Lzzy's vocal and the strings just *bloom.* It became cinematic; it gives me chills thinking about it."

MY REDEMPTION
"This is a beautiful song. Lzzy just ripping throughout, and I love that. It's just a ripper, it doesn't stop the whole time."

BOMBSHELL
"We're writing with hugeness in mind. It's kind of experimental in its weirdness and arrangement cos it stays in F the whole time and there's an allusion to a chord change in the chorus. Then when it finally changes on the last chorus, it's this big release."

I COME FIRST
"Lzzy wrote it and the rest of us were like, 'That's pretty on the nose.' It was a bit of a discussion for a few weeks until she went back and rewrote some of the verses, and turned it from another Halestorm sex song to something with substance."

PSYCHO CRAZY
"It's that other side of Lzzy Hale – Mz. Hyde. The screams in it are like, get *out!* We must have put together 30 to 50 sequences of these songs, and a moment I love is *Psycho Crazy* into *Raise Your Horns*. They belong together."

RAISE YOUR HORNS
"The first time I heard *Raise Your Horns*, I cried. There's no other place you could put it on the record. It's gotta sit with you. There's got to be some silence after that to digest for a bit."

Lzzy Hale: songwriter, warrior, raiser of horns

have we found that 'thing' yet?'" remembers Joe. "Lzzy showed it to us and we were all like, 'There it is!'"

"We all looked at each other like, 'My god, this is so dumb. It's perfect,'" Lzzy says. "It's exactly what we wanted to say.'"

You can feel that euphoria and sense of release in *Back From The Dead*'s cover art, an explosion of frustration and catharsis that shows Lzzy screaming through the camera from blood-red shadows, shattering a pane of glass. She describes the whole album as a "story of survival": "There is the mental health aspect and me trying to dig myself out of a hole, and there's also the survival aspect that we're back from the dead, and the forgiveness aspect of my redemption. It's just the ebb and flow of all these things. We lived a couple of different lifetimes through this time, and this album is a snapshot of what we were going through."

"I WANTED TO WRITE HER AN ANTHEM"

LZZY HALE

Unsurprisingly, *Back From The Dead* contains some of Halestorm's darkest lyrics to date, although, in typical Lzzy style, even the rawest moments are turned into moments of empowerment. On crunchy rocker *My Redemption*, while the verse starts: *'In a hole down so deep, suffocating from fear / running from purpose, while losing my grip...'* by the chorus, she's flipped the narrative on its head: *'I don't need saving, to save myself... I'm my own redemption.'*

I Come First sees Lzzy back in her element, a swaggering play on innuendo of self-worth and female sexuality, while on the raging *Bombshell* she takes aim at sexism in the music industry, giving short shrift to men who make the grave mistake of underestimating women who rock just as hard as they can: *'She is not fragile like a flower / She is fragile like a bomb.'*

When questioned further on this, she recognises her tendency to veer towards the positive rather than wallowing in darkness: "I needed to for myself but... I always feel better when I get it done, when I have something, and I've created something out of nothing."

Elsewhere, the album is a call to arms to live your truest life. Despite her growing fame, Lzzy has cultivated a unique relationship with her fans, remaining more accessible than your average rockstar and responding personally to messages on social media, while she created the #raiseyourhorns hashtag to highlight the subject of mental health on Twitter. And, although she's keen to offer the caveat that she isn't a professional, she's often reached out to fans with advice and support.

"*Strange Girl* was directly influenced by one of those conversations I was having," she says. "There was a young girl I was talking to. She came out to her parents shortly before lockdown; they were absolutely not understanding at all. This is going to sound harsh, but it's what she told me: her parents said death would have been better, to not even have a daughter. I took this conversation into one of our writing sessions

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and wanted to write her an anthem, in order to remind her we're both one and the same and we're in this together."

Later, the track *Steeple* is an open love letter to the fans who she says were there for her at her lowest moment. "One of our fans, on an off-chance, said: 'Hey Lzzy, you're online. How are you doing today?'" she recalls. "I had a moment of honesty and I said, 'You know, honestly, I'm not feeling too good today. I'm sad and I'm not sure why.' They reversed my #raiseyourhorns hashtag and were like, 'Hey, let's all send our horns to Lzzy!' So when I went back online there were all these pictures of all these people saying, 'We're here if you want to talk to us, you're always here for us.' We made that bridge from 'onstage' to 'fan' a little bit shorter."

The song itself feels like more than just obligatory lip service to the people who buy her music. With an anthemic, soaring chorus ('*This is my kingdom, this is my cathedral, this is my castle, these are my people*') it's sure to become one of the most powerful moments of their live set.

"SHE DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS ROLE. IT JUST HAPPENED"

JOE HOTTINGER

"She is honest, she's a positive human and always has been," Joe tells us later, his voice full of admiration for his partner and bandmate. "She realises her role in a lot of people's lives whether she knows them or not. She didn't ask for that job, it just happened."

"I'm not trying to create this facade that life is going to be great if you have the right outlook," insists Lzzy. "It's not. Life sucks, it's weird; we still don't know anything about it. But the positive thing is, if you've gotten through some of these things… you'll still have those tools in your arsenal."

As our call with Lzzy comes to a close, and the conversation turns to what she's learned over the last two years, it's clear that, after everything that went down during the pandemic, Lzzy Hale has changed forever. She's still the same bona fide rock star who can command thousand-strong audiences and inspire a new generation of fans to follow their dreams. But then there's the other side, the 'Elizabeth Hale' part of her personality, which is "anxious and definitely not as sociable as I would normally be". Most importantly, she says, her "strange, solitary journey" has shown her that it's OK to be vulnerable.

"Now I feel like I think both sides of me can form an alliance," she says. "We can coexist. I don't have to be one or the other. I can be a mashup of the two. You don't have to have that armour up… I don't always have to be this beacon of hope all the time."

After years of writing music with everyone in mind except herself, she admits her writing process for *Back From The Dead* was "selfish". "I wasn't thinking, 'Is this too dark for our fans? Is our label going to like it? Is it catchy enough for radio?' It was more or less just about me. I see that person that I was trying to heal, but then I know that our fans are going to be able to see themselves in these songs too."

The result is an album that "seems amazingly universal". "I realised that, if I was going through it, millions of other people are also going through it," she says. "By breaking it down to that core, you realise I'm not alone in any of this. None of us are." H

***BACK FROM THE DEAD* IS OUT ON MAY 6 VIA ATLANTIC**

Joe Hottinger: keen to counter destructive forces with creative ones

COMIC TIMING

We got the inside story of Halestorm's first graphic novel, paranormal superhero story *Hyde Manor*

SO HOW ON EARTH DID *HYDE MANOR* COME ABOUT?
Joe Hottinger: "Our buddy [music industry insider] Josh Bernstein is a comic book nut and he has this comic book company [Z2]. He approached us and was like, 'Would you guys be interested in something like a graphic novel?' He introduced us to the Winner Twins [Brittany and Brianna], who wrote it. They're so creative, and it's just been great fun working with these female artists and keeping it this female-centric thing."

WHAT'S THE STORY?
"The twins were like, 'We can write you into this thing where you come off tour and you go to this manor on the west coast of Oregon that has a history of being haunted. You're all burnt out and Lzzy goes to the guest house to take a day and reset herself, but she comes back and she's dressed different and things are wrong. She starts to be mean, and you realise it's not Lzzy, it's Mz Hyde [taken from Halestorm's song of the same name].' It's this whole battle between Lzzy and Mz. Hyde. It's awesome."

WAS IT BASED ON LZZY'S SELF-DISCOVERY JOURNEY DURING THE PANDEMIC, OF MEETING HER FORMER SELF, ELIZABETH HALE?
"Yeah, it's kind of like a fun version of that, but much more ridiculous!"

***HYDE MANOR* IS DUE IN OCTOBER. SEE MORE AT Z2COMICS.COM**

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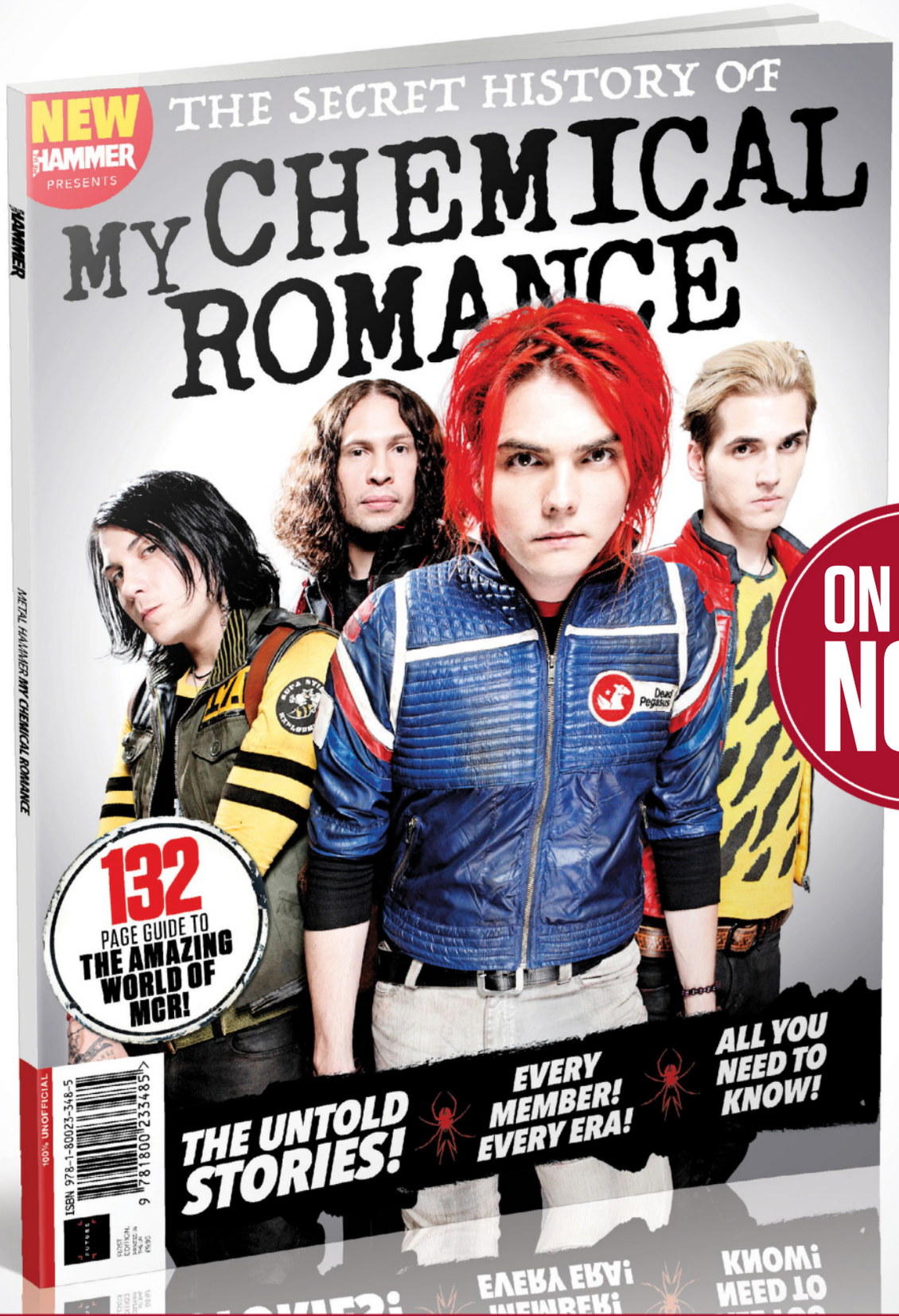

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RAMMSTEIN

A BRIEF HIST

DRY OF ZEIT

After the decade-long gap between their last two albums, no one believed Rammstein would drop *another* record so soon – especially one as deep, existential and downright emotional as *Zeit*

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: JENS KOCH

Director Robert Gwisdek with Rammstein keyboard legend Flake Lorenz

Frontman Till Lindemann: flour power

Scott Ian remembers exactly where he was when he first heard Rammstein: in a prison cell. In 1996, Anthrax's guitarist was cast as an extra in David Lynch's dark thriller *Lost Highway*, and was on set to film a jail scene (cut from the film's final edit) featuring fellow musician Henry Rollins and actor Bill Pullman, when a distorted guitar riff from the German band's debut album, *Herzeleid*, kicked in through the sound stage's speakers. "It was unbelievably loud," Scott recalls. "You know when you hear about how they torture people with loud music so they can't sleep? It was *that* loud. I was like, 'What the fuck is happening here?'"

The following summer, at the With Full Force festival, held on July 5, 1997 at an airfield in Zwickau, Germany, Anthrax's guitarist would see the band play live, ahead of the release of their second album, *Sehnsucht*. Rammstein's incendiary performance on that afternoon still burns brightly in his memory today, not least because, at the time, after a decade touring the world, Scott Ian thought he had seen it all.

"I specifically remember that Till had a flamethrower and was shooting this stream of fire 50 to 60 feet out over the crowd," he remembers. "I was like, 'This is insane.' It was like going to a Broadway show. And they weren't even headlining!"

Twenty-five years on, Rammstein are no longer an unknown quantity. If not yet a household name, they can reasonably lay claim to being the biggest cult band in the world, and one of the hottest tickets on the live circuit; good luck scoring admission to any date on their upcoming European stadium tour if you haven't already done so. And yet, despite their ascendancy into modern rock's elite, the sextet's capacity to surprise and unsettle remains undiminished.

That much was evident earlier this year, when, without the music industry's standard hype or fanfare, on March 10 the group dropped the weighty, intense, symbolism-heavy video for *Zeit* ('Time'), revealed as the title track of their forthcoming eighth album. Abandoning conventional narrative structure, the track's striking, surrealistic video, directed by German actor/film-maker Robert Gwisdek, is a classic Rammstein headfuck, featuring ominous cloaked figures, warring soldiers regressing to childhood, a newborn baby re-entering its mother's vagina, and assorted vignettes pivoting on images of death and rebirth. Within minutes of the video debuting online, Reddit threads and message boards were aflame with hardcore fans seeking to unlock its mysteries; faced with lyrics such as *'Wenn unsere zeit gekommen ist, dann ist es zeit zu gehen'* ('When our time has come, then it is time to go') some remain convinced that Rammstein are intimating that their own life cycle is winding inexorably to its conclusion. Quite possibly relishing the confusion sown, the enigmatic Berliners have done nothing to address such speculation: in fact, as with the low-key, understated launch of their untitled album in May 2019, the group have elected to share their new album with the world entirely devoid of commentary, context or explication. Instead, when fielding media requests for interviews, they've collectively nominated Robert Gwisdek, the 38-year-old director of the *Zeit* video, to share his personal perspectives on Rammstein 2022 in their stead, a duty the native Berliner undertakes with grace and no little charm.

"*Zeit* isn't about getting older, so much as it's a contemplation of time itself," he clarifies in conversation with *Hammer*. "The idea isn't that things are ending. Rather, that things progress through the river of time and there is no ending, just different stages."

"People think they know Rammstein because of videos like *Pussy* or *Deutschland*, but then they'll do something like surfing in a tiny boat while waving an LGBTQ+ flag," he adds. "The funny thing about Rammstein is that they are still evolving, they aren't being left behind by the times."

If Rammstein's reluctance to grant interviews in the run-up to the release of *Zeit* helps maintain a sense of intrigue around the collective and their motivations, their actions often speak louder than words ever could. While some of their arch provocations are served up with a sense of theatre and knowing humour, in recent years the sextet have been unafraid to use their platform to highlight human rights abuses, injustice and intolerance.

They have been vocal in their unambiguous support for LGBTQ+ causes – guitarists Richard Kruspe and Paul Landers drawing global attention to the hostility faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Russia after sharing a kiss onstage during a July 2019 performance in Moscow – and equally committed in expressing their support for Ukraine

“THE IDEA ISN’T THAT THINGS ARE ENDING”

ROBERT GWISDEK, *ZEIT* VIDEO DIRECTOR

in the wake of the Russian invasion in February 2022, Till cancelling scheduled shows in Russia in a show of solidarity with the under siege nation. Alongside members of Faith No More, Agnostic Front, Stabbing Westward and more, guitarist Richard Kruspe recently contributed to a charity single recording of The Beatles’ *Come Together*, with all proceeds from sales earmarked for humanitarian aid projects in Ukraine. And in March, vocalist Till Lindemann was spotted greeting refugees in Berlin to assist them in finding accommodation.

In the light of this activism, one might perhaps envisage that *Zeit* would be rooted in the six musicians’ heightened determination to expose and critique humanity’s darkest urges and most base compulsion. Given that 9.5 years

CAPTURING THE ZEITGEIST

German actor/film-maker Robert Gwisdek on how he put together such an epic video for the lead-off single

HOW AWARE WERE YOU OF RAMMSTEIN’S MUSIC?
“I’m from East Germany, so since Rammstein started releasing music they’ve basically been omnipresent. At an early age I listened to [Flake, Paul and Christoph’s early band] Feeling B, so they’ve always been in the back of my mind. You can’t grow up where I did without knowing Rammstein, though. I’ve always loved the ambiguity with the band, too; you can’t pin them down lyrically or musically because they don’t do one thing. They keep so much back that you can’t help but feel fascinated by this Rammstein machine.”

WHAT WAS IT LIKE ON SET?
“They have a really good work ethic – they come in ready to follow instructions from the director. They aren’t messing around, acting like rock stars and turning up late. They’re gentlemen to each and every person they deal with. They’re so friendly and such a delight to work with, on all levels.”

WHAT WAS THE SCOPE OF REFERENCE FOR THE SYMBOLISM THROUGHOUT THE VIDEO?
“When they enter the sand world, it was important for me to find a way of expressing the idea of time without just turning it into the grim reaper or something. The mood we were emanating is this idea that the being is neutral, perhaps even comforting, taking you along like a guide. It lives beyond the realm of physicality, but is able to guide you through that. I wanted it to be dark, but not in a dangerous way.”

WHAT ABOUT THE BACKWARDS MOVEMENT OF THE SAND?
“I wanted to play with time, because we can experience it in different ways – not just in slow motion, but going backwards. You can feel it in your guts, that time isn’t just a line from A to B, it’s something that can be transcended, in a way. The blindfolds during the backwards birth was this idea that we’re all living among the miracles that are time and space, but we’re not really aware of all the things that are created by it. At the same time, we’re still a part of that miraculous process; we’ve all experienced birth and lots will give birth themselves, so we are miracles in that way.”

HOW HAVE PEOPLE RESPONDED TO THE REVERSE BIRTH?
“I knew if I was playing with birth in a Rammstein video, it had to be graphic! We couldn’t make it soft it any way because that would go against what Rammstein do. I love that though, that it forces us to confront these things – especially as men – that we’d otherwise avoid. We’re so sexualised graphically, in so many ways, that you don’t see how humans come into the world. YouTube took the video down for half a day because they couldn’t decide if it was too much – they had to check the guidelines – but it worked.”

Feeling corny: one of the scenes in the *Zeit* video

separated the release of the untitled album and its predecessor, 2009's *Liebe ist für alle da*, one might even be tempted to view Rammstein's surprise return in 2022 as a physical reiteration of their long-standing commitment to the pursuit of freedom, individualism and the celebration of life lived free from shame, apology or regret. And then one might glance at Till Lindemann's lyrics for new songs *OK* (shorthand for 'Ohne Kondom', without a condom in English) and *Dicke Titten* (translated as, er, Big Tits) and remember that trying to second-guess Rammstein is a fool's game.

To this writer, *Zeit* is the sound of a band that blew up the world taking time to sift through the ashes. In terms of the Rammstein canon, its songs share most DNA with *Untitled*, or 2005's *Rosenrot*, being largely more nuanced, reflective and existential than explosive/provocative past efforts such as *Feuer Frei!* or *Pussy*.

But there are gloriously batshit moments, too. A satirical analysis of society's obsession with conventional beauty – and presumably people's desire to stave off time's effect on their appearance – new single *Zick Zack* features lyrics such as *'Belly fat into the organic waste bin/Now the penis sees the sun again'*, while the unapologetically bawdy *Dicke Titten* commences with full oompah-style brass for the intro, because… Rammstein. The musical cherry on top is the utterly enormous riff that kicks off album closer *Adieu*, its echoes of Led Zeppelin's monumental *Kashmir* a knowing and respectful nod to one of rock's original stadium acts.

"THIS IS A BRUTALISING RELATIONSHIP"

PROFESSOR KAREN LEEDER

And that's just a surface reading of this intriguing and engaging work. Mindful that some of the subtleties and nuances woven into Rammstein's multi-layered art can bypass those of us not blessed with a comprehensive understanding of German art, history, culture and linguistics, we sought out an expert in the field, Karen Leeder, Professor of Modern German Literature, and Fellow and Tutor in German at New College, Oxford, for a deep dive into Till Lindemann's dark, expressive poetry.

The Professor's incisive analysis reveals the true depth and range of *Zeit*, from the call to arms of *Armee Der Tristen* ('Army of the Dreary') – "a rallying cry for the forlorn and abandoned," she explains, featuring a nod to the Communist Party Worker's *United Front Song*, written by Bertolt Brecht, and referenced on 2001's *Mutter* – to the deceptively straightforward *Angst* ('Fear'), wherein a traditional playground game offers a familiar starting point for a dark parable on intolerance in Europe. Then there's the unsettling domestic drama of *Meine Tranen* ('My Tears').

"Rammstein fans will recognise another metaphorical matricide," says the Professor. "This one sets the scene with a mother and her son, now a grown man, still living together in a claustrophobic relationship in a house that is too small. They are alone and silent, but this is also a brutalising relationship; the mother figure strikes the son's face and demands that he does not cry."

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"PEOPLE WEREN'T EXPECTING TO GET SO EMOTIONAL"

ROBERT GWISDEK

When they first assembled in 1994 in a rehearsal studio in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, the six members of Rammstein shared a disdain for orthodoxy, a hatred of conformity, and an enthusiasm for disruption and provocation.

"We're here to cause problems, to cause trouble," Paul Landers told a UK magazine in 2001. "I like the fact that some people hate us. We're artists, and art should cause such feelings."

All these years later, as is evident on *Zeit*, Rammstein's guiding principles remain in place. Now a band with millions of fans around the world (with 40,000 tuning in on YouTube just to watch the premiere of the *Zeit* video), they also possess enough mystery to hark back to the unknowable rock and metal gods who conquered the earth half a century ago. And, in *Zeit*'s potent video and music, Rammstein in 2022 have given us all pause for reflection – and yet more surprise.

"I was really touched because there was a huge article in a German newspaper that basically talked about how during a time when there are wars starting, we have these images of children holding guns at each other, that hit an emotional note in us to remind us that we're all somebody's children," says Robert Gwisdek of the current climate. "Who'd have thought this band who've played with violence so much would be comforting us in a time where we're all so unsure of the world? There is a surprise in the reception to this video, as people weren't expecting to get so emotional!"

***ZEIT* WILL BE RELEASED ON APRIL 29 VIA SPINEFARM/UNIVERSAL. RAMMSTEIN PLAY THE UK IN JUNE**

Zeit is a headfuck – if you've not watched it yet, you need to have a word with yourself

MOTIONLESS IN ZEIT

In 2014, Motionless In White covered Rammstein classic *Du Hast*. We asked guitarist Ricky Olson to review *Zeit*'s moving title track

"I think the song is great! It feels so haunting; a lot of their songs have that surreal, almost dream-type feel. In the past, their singles have always had the crazy, in-your-face sound that we've grown to love [from Rammstein], so for them to put out a song like this was kind of like, 'OK, this is an interesting take on what you guys are trying to do next.' This felt almost like a eulogy, very dark and sad.

"I'm a big visual guy, so I watched the music video first and I think that really helped shape how I felt about the song. It felt like a romanticised idea of time and how we value this concept of being in the moment, but nobody ever wants to actually *live* in the moment.

"There are so many bands in our world that have taken so much from Rammstein that I think that our entire generation of music would not exist without that band."

MOTIONLESS IN WHITE: PRESS

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With his massive 80s beats, a story about a serial killer called Bret Halford and a huge helping of fun, Carpenter Brut has become synthwave's biggest and most metal star

4.

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH • ILLUSTRATIONS: FØRTIFEM

DEC. 14 1991

Carpenter Brut has a real name. You can Google it. For now, though, he's just Carpenter Brut. He's 45 years old, French, and overly apologetic about his English (it's fine). Most importantly, he has a penchant for big beats. That's all you need to know.

"People know my real name because, one day, a journalist told people," he says, over a Zoom call with no video. "It wasn't my choice. The rules from the beginning were that Carpenter Brut needed to be secret – people just had to focus on the music, the story and the visual. You don't know the face of the CEO of Nike, but you know the brand. That's enough."

Carpenter's sharp – he'll trail off mid-sentence to translate a word he's unsure of, thinking ahead. Quicker than a DeLorean at 88mph. He has to be. Since forming 10 years ago, he's gathered increasing momentum.

Releasing three ordinal EPs (reissued as an LP, *Trilogy*) between 2012 and 2015, he swiftly established his 'thing': garish, Justice-style rhythms and John Carpenter synth lines, flecked with guitar that's heavy enough to crawl onto the Hellfest lineup.

Carpenter Brut's first 'proper' full-length, *Leather Teeth*, arrived in 2018. It was a half-hour thrill-ride that chiselled his face – so just a blob, then? – into the Mount Rushmore of the subgenre now dubbed synthwave, alongside Perturbator and Gost. The trilogy format is what Carpenter Brut honed his craft with, and on *Leather Teeth*, he started another.

"Trilogies in cinema are always cool," he explains. "Sometimes you have a bad second or third movie, like with *RoboCop*. But *Star Wars*? *Back To The Future*? It's a cool format for albums, because you can write songs differently. You have this palette of vibes, so that you can write a love song; then you have the angry songs for when the character grows up."

The 'character' he's referring to isn't just a throwaway line – he's talking about a protagonist he's actually created for his *Leather* triptych, for three movies that don't even exist. You keeping up?

On *Leather Teeth*, he established a schlocky, video nasty-esque narrative centred around a fictional science student from 1987 named Bret Halford. He's bullied and he can't get the girl, so he creates a potion to control his peers. The experiment disfigures his face, so he tries his hand at being a heavy metal singer. In *Leather Terror*, he gets stabby. The plot's thinner than cigarette paper, but that's half of the fun. Carpenter's already come up with ideas for the third, closing chapter of the *Leather* series.

"HE'S DEFROSTED HUNDREDS OF YEARS LATER"
CARPENTER BRUT

"The story is just as stupid as every other Z-movie," he admits. "I'm not writing a new *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy. Bret's locked in a [walk-in freezer] at the end of *Leather Terror*, like in *The Shining*. He's frozen, then there's a power outage on the next album, and he's defrosted hundreds of years later. He wants to take revenge on the descendants of those who bullied him when he was young."

When describing sound, Carpenter doesn't grab musical reference points as normal musicians do. Apart from suggesting the next instalment will be a little more industrial, he's drawing up a proper, thematic thread. He's talking sci-fi adventures – everything from *Blade Runner* to *Idiocracy*.

And with that giddiness, he's forgotten to promote his current record. Off he goes, years into the future, already plotting Bret Halford's fate centuries away. *Leather Terror* is worth reining him in for, though. It's a denser, more *metal* approach to synthesised music than his previous outings, but with one notable difference: there's not a guitar in sight.

"Queen used to write 'No synthesisers!' on the back of their albums," says Carpenter. "And then in the 80s, it was a big trend to use synths. I thought it would be cool to invert that and make a metal album without guitar. For the strongest riffs, I added, like, 10 synths and mixed them as if they were guitars; if you think the

album is loud and powerful enough only with synth, I guess the job is done. I'm trying to… not break the rules, but add some new ones."

Instrumentally, *Leather Terror* achieves its goal. It's a hefty old thing, and that's before you even take the guest appearances into account. Carpenter initially planned to take 2020 off, but when the world shut down, he pounced. "Everybody was bored at home, so pretty much all the people I asked were available," he laughs. "I always liked Tribulation. We have common friends, so I asked Johannes [Andersson, Tribulation's vocalist] if he wanted to do something. He answered, 'What the fuck is Carpenter Brut?' Ha!"

Given Johannes screams for a band that used to play Swedish death metal, his presence on *Leather Terror*'s title track caps the record off on a rather abrasive note. It's made even more raucous thanks to drums from Converge's Ben Koller – "We recorded it at Kurt Ballou's studio, like for a Converge album!" – and a mean streak you can't fake. Slap in a feature from a returning guest, Ulver's Kristoffer Rygg; silky smooth melodies courtesy of Greg Puciato, making your hips swing like Elvis on a roundabout; plus Alex Westaway from British synthwavers Gunship, Sylvaine's Kathrine Shepard and Parisian singer Persha… and that's quite the knees-up.

For someone who wants to stay away from the limelight, Carpenter Brut's gotten around. He recorded a track with Municipal Waste's Tony Foresta for the *Leather Terror* sessions, which remains unreleased. Napalm Death's Barney Greenway, Killing Joke's Jaz Coleman and Deftones' Chino Moreno were all set to appear, too – scheduling conflicts scuppered these collaborations, but the door remains open. Because everyone wants a slice of Carpenter Brut. He's a lifer. He *lives* for heavy metal.

"MY KNIFE'S BIGGER THAN MESHUGGAH'S!"

CARPENTER BRUT

"My life is pretty much only to be a musician," he says. "I don't have a special life. I'm a son of metal, and the metal scene is one of the richest in the world. With Carpenter Brut, I gather completely different people. Metalheads, electro fans, young people, old people. With, for example, politics, they always want two different people together under a common programme – something like that. With Carpenter Brut, you get so many different people in the same place at the same moment. I'm proud of it."

He's not bringing about world peace with sick beats, but the sentiment rings true. At your average Brut show, you'll see all sorts larking about. It's a vibe comparable to industrial bands like Skinny Puppy and Front Line Assembly, or the dance-punk crossover whirlwind that is The Prodigy. It doesn't matter if you're gurning, twerking, or headbanging. Just be cool. It's something heavy metal fans have taken to heart.

"When we play at metal festivals, there are always people who are interested," he says. "But sometimes, because my previous EPs were a bit more 'funny', it could maybe seem like a joke to them. But we played at Hellfest in 2018, in the tent, and there were 10,000 people there. Just to party!"

While he teeters between metal, horror and dance by a glowstick's breadth, Carpenter Brut *gets* that his stuff is perfect for shit-hot chase scenes and sci-fi splattery. But he's not some John Carpenter wannabe, living in the shadow of horror's moustachioed maestro. Brut's already making steam when it comes to scoring film, albeit by accident. Seth Ickerman, the team who directed the 2016 video for Carpenter Brut's *Turbo Killer*, suggested he lay down some tracks for an upcoming cosmic horror film. In return, Carpenter Brut would receive a ready-made music video. That movie became *Blood Machines*, released in 2020 via spooky streaming platform Shudder.

"I never got my video clip, ha!" Carpenter exclaims. "You ask for a four-minute video clip, and they come back with a movie. But it was great. It was the first time I'd made

a soundtrack on this scale. I'm just frustrated that the movie didn't get a wider audience."

Horror, metal, unity – he's 'ours' and we're his. He notes that Meshuggah's new record comes out on the same day as *Leather Terror*: "They also have a new album that's got a guy with a knife on the cover… but my knife's bigger!" Metal has embraced Carpenter Brut, but the sky, space or wherever Jeff Bezos fucks off to is the limit. The appetite for 80s aesthetics has never been more voracious, thanks to TV shows like *Stranger Things*, plus superstars such as The Weeknd dragging up the corpse of decades gone by for one last boogie.

Carpenter Brut is an audiovisual riot. He's popped the synthwave bubble, and with a live show that goes harder than work events at Downing Street, the crossover scope for his shtick is similar to The Prodigy. We can't see his face, but when this is suggested, you can feel the red in his cheeks.

"We'll see what the future…" he trails off. *Click clack click clack. Space. Click.* "Holds!" H

***LEATHER TERROR* IS OUT NOW VIA UNIVERSAL MUSIC. CARPENTER BRUT TOURS THE UK IN NOVEMBER**

SLAVE To The Beat

Ulver's Kristoffer Rygg explains how he got sucked into Carpenter Brut's neo-noir underworld

HOW DID YOU MEET CARPENTER BRUT AND GET INVOLVED WITH HIS MUSIC?
"Our initial contact was Neuropa Records, who released *Trilogy* on LP. They told me that Carpenter Brut was into our stuff and keen to play, and sent me the three first EPs. I was blown away! So fucking good. I ended up recording *Cheerleader Effect* [on *Leather Teeth*] before meeting him, which happened when he played in Oslo. I was standing in the audience hearing myself from the PA! What a great way to do a gig, I thought. Then we all partied… Our last meeting was under similar circumstances. We shared the stage at Roskilde 2019, with Robert Plant lurking about. It was Ulver's last gig before the pandemic paralysed the world."

WHAT IS IT ABOUT CARPENTER BRUT THAT APPEALS TO YOU?
"It's like nostalgia on testosterone. He's just unbelievably good at what he does – it's impossible not to nod along when those beats kick in! On a more personal note, we're the same age, grew up with the same movies, same music, same – broken – dreams. It's often a right laugh when Saturday evening comes and the old YouTube clips tick in from him. There's a good balance between reverence and humour going on in his universe, mixed with those unmistakably dark and bloody synth stabs! That's what I dig, and I'm obviously not alone."

WHAT DID YOU BRING TO THE SONG *GOOD NIGHT, GOODBYE*?
"Well, my voice… and words! A sort of mix between Alfred Hitchcock and [1984 William Gibson novel] *Neuromancer*. Tore [Ylwizaker, Ulver] played the piano, and Sander [Ole Alexander Halstensgård, Ulver] provided samples. *Leather Terror* ups the leather and spike-factor, although *Good Night, Goodbye* is more mellow."

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE FUTURE OF BRET HALFORD?
"He'll transform… Transcend!"

PRESS

THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

For Trivium's Matt Heafy, side-project Ibaraki hasn't just been about making extreme music with the legendary Ihsahn, but about sharing his love for his Japanese heritage

WORDS: MATT MILLS

On August 6, 1945, at 8:15am local time, the US Army Air Forces Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb, codenamed 'Little Boy,' on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. As a direct result of the blast, an estimated 66,000 people were killed and approximately 69,000 more injured: 69% of the city's buildings were destroyed. Three days later, a second nuclear device, 'Fat Man,' was detonated over the city of Nagasaki, resulting in a further 60,000-80,000 fatalities. Within a week, Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied forces, bringing World War II to an end.

As part of the negotiated post-WWII peace treaties, the US military took control of Japanese Imperial Army and Navy bases across the country. Four decades on, Brian 'Bubba' Heafy, a sergeant in the Marine Corps who served from 1982-1989, was stationed in Iwakuni, on the island of Honshu, approximately 30 miles from Hiroshima. When the young soldier fell in love with a local girl from Hiroshima, senior officers at the base strongly advised him against pursuing the relationship.

"Whenever you're in the military and stationed somewhere, you have to disclose if you're in a relationship with someone where you're staying," explains Matt Heafy, the couple's eldest child. "They highly pushed him to not marry my mum: 'You should not do this; you cannot do this.'" Fortunately, the young couple's love was not to be extinguished.

By his own admission, during his childhood, Matthew Kiichi Heafy's biracial ethnicity made him feel "not Asian enough for the Asian kids and not white enough for the white kids". The 36-year-old musician similarly describes Trivium – a defining force of the 00s melodic metalcore movement – as too metal for hardcore, too hardcore for metal.

When it comes to Ibaraki though, the identity is crystal clear. Its debut album, *Rashomon*, is a progressive black metal onslaught, partially written in collaboration with Emperor frontman Ihsahn. With lyrics rooted in Japanese tradition, lead single *Tamashii No Houkai* announced the project in a flurry of blastbeats, symphonics and Eastern-inspired melodies – as well as samples from the Super Mario games. *Rōnin* is a nine-minute behemoth that employs a screeching cameo from My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way that wouldn't sound out of place in Oathbreaker. On *Ibaraki-Dōji*, strings swell over Matt's gut-churning growls about the legendary Battle of Rashomon Gate, featuring the demon of the title. *Susanoo No Mikoto* honours the Shinto storm god of the same name, narrating his battle with the eight-headed dragon Yamata No Orochi, and *Kagutsuchi* takes its title from the god of fire.

"A DRAGON ATE SEVEN OF THEIR DAUGHTERS"
MATT HEAFY

Long story short: Ibaraki has brought Matt Heafy's life back full circle. When he was young, his mother Yoshiko, a practicing follower of the Shinto religion, told him many of the tales that would eventually resurface on *Rashomon*. "It's been great to retell them and use them to teach a lesson," he says. "Just like in Greek mythology, the [Shinto] gods aren't really good. Susanoo No Mikoto was expelled from the heavens and a family came up to him: 'This dragon has eaten seven of our daughters and wants to eat the eighth. Can you help?' He said, 'If she'll be my wife, I'll help.' It shows that gods can be just as bad as humans."

Matt delivers his own unique take on gods behaving badly

PRESS

"BLACK METAL IS AN ATTITUDE"

Emperor man and solo artist Ihsahn explains what it's like to work with Matt Heafy

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF TRIVIUM'S MUSIC?
"To me, it was metal for the next generation. I could hear all the influences that I had, but they took it in a different direction to what I did. They're super-talented musicians; from the clean vocals to the more extreme stuff, you could tell that they were influenced by something much wider than just what that band was about."

WHAT ABOUT MATT'S FIRST DEMO MADE YOU WANT TO WORK WITH HIM?
"I could hear the potential in the writing. A lot of artists who are interested in black metal write something that's very olden. For me, black metal is an attitude; it's not a type of guitar sound or vocals. It's the emotions that it conjures up. We discussed my approach to it: 'If you want to make a black-metal-like album, I'm probably not your guy.' He immediately got that."

WHERE DID YOU GET THE IDEA OF TAPPING INTO JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY FROM?
"Norwegian black metal dug into our cultural heritage – not so much Emperor, but something like Enslaved. Matt was very taken with that, but I felt that there was something more interesting in his Japanese heritage. All these pantheons are reflections of human emotions and archetypes. They simplify the chaos of the world to help us understand it."

WHAT WERE YOUR ORIGINAL PLANS FOR THE RIFFS YOU LET MATT USE?
"I have a lot of sketches on my computer that have developed over so many years. While playing and writing [Ibaraki] stuff, I felt that those riffs really fit into the aesthetics of what me and Matt had been talking about."

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU AND MATT GEL SO WELL?
"He is a really positive person to be around. He's really creative and I feel kinship with that. I meet a lot of musicians who basically like to sit around and complain about whatever venue they're playing and drink beer. I don't connect well with that."

Ibaraki are influenced by everything from Shinto gods to Super Mario

A young Matt grinning away with his mother Yoshiko

Matt remembers his parents being "completely selfless" when he was growing up. Before he'd even started nursery school, the family immigrated to America, despite his mother barely knowing English. Yoshiko became a full-time homemaker, raising Matt and his little sister Michelle while their father was away with the military. Gradually his father travelled less; soon after Matt joined Trivium at the age of 12, he became the band's manager.

Matt's home life kept him in touch with his Asian roots. Not only did his mother relay traditional stories to him, he also grew up watching anime and playing Nintendo games. But at school he recalls Asian-American history being glossed over in the curriculum. During World War II, the US incarcerated around 120,000 citizens of Japanese descent in concentration camps; Matt recalls the subject being discussed in class as "a five- or 10-minute thing". "I remember going, 'Wait, what?!', and then they just skipped over it," he says.

"The first time I ever realised I was different was in elementary school," he adds. "Kids were talking about what they had for breakfast. Someone asked me, 'Matt, what did you have?' I said, 'Rice and salmon, like the rest of you, right?' They went, 'What? That's disgusting! Why would you do that?!'"

The frontman describes a childhood where he was a misfit but never a victim. Despite cultural differences, and him being the only extreme metal fan in school, he says he was never bullied. "I was [in the gifted and talented school programme], so all the kids I was with were kind of the outcasts," he explains. "I feel like I just barely made the mark, though. Those were some very, very intelligent kids that I grew up with."

"I WANT TO START SINGING IN JAPANESE"
MATT HEAFY

When touring with Trivium, however, he became increasingly aware of racism directed towards him based on his heritage. "I remember a kid pulling his eyes to the side and doing the racist Asian face thing to me. I've had that happen a lot."

Trivium quickly became rising stars. Their Roadrunner debut, 2005's *Ascendancy*, reaped rave reviews. Their first UK cover feature came accompanied by the words 'Sabbath… Maiden… Metallica… TRIVIUM: The Hottest Metal Band Of The Century'. Still in his late teens – and still naive as to music industry etiquette – their frontman gave interviews about wanting his band to be the next Metallica, and also about indulging in threesomes and foursomes with groupies on the road. Needless to say, some of his peers were unimpressed.

"A lot of our favourite bands started bullying us," he remembers. "They were all older than us and we were saying we were the biggest band in the world. They didn't like that. On tour they'd treat us badly and they'd talk badly about us in the press."

Fortunately, one band not in that camp was Emperor. A fan of the Norwegian black metal kingpins since he was 15, Matt recalls wearing their shirts in photoshoots to the point that Emperor's record label, Candlelight, started sending him merch as a thank you. Correspondence with the label gradually turned into back-and-forth emails with the group's frontman. As their friendship developed, the Japanese-American musician sent Ihsahn a demo of a black metal song he'd been working on. "He was like, 'This is good!'" Matt recalls. "'It sounds like true black metal.'"

The release of Ihsahn's fourth solo album, *Eremita*, in 2012 inspired Matt to push his side-project (then using the pseudonym Mrityu) in a more progressive direction. "I feel like black metal came out of the idea of, 'Metal's all the same; let's make something more extreme,'" he explains. "But then, when you stick to that, it becomes the same thing again: something to break against. *Eremita* did that for me: it had saxophone solos, clean singing, jazz chords and really slow moments that have nothing to do with black metal. That's more black metal to me, ethically, than just sticking to the same thing because you're supposed to. I'd rather listen to *Perdition City* [by Ulver] than someone trying to be Bathory."

It was Ihsahn who encouraged Matt to root Ibaraki in Japanese folklore. "I said to Ihsahn, 'I wish I was Scandinavian, so I could write about Thor battling Jörmungandr at Ragnarök.' He was like, 'Matt, it's been done! Tap into your Japanese side.' My mind was blown."

The suggestion made perfect sense. Matt has a back tattoo of Susanoo No Mikoto and Yamata No Orochi doing battle, and a piece inspired by the Battle of Rashomon Gate on his left arm. Plus, the skull of Ibaraki-Dōji has become the *de facto* Trivium mascot since appearing on the cover of their 2015 album, *Silence In The Snow*. And as he shares tales of his birthplace in interviews promoting Ibaraki, he considers 2022 the ideal time to teach the world about Japan's rich mythology.

"Over the last couple years, we've seen a ton of [anti-] Asian racism," he explains. "You see it all around the world because of Covid, and it's so insane to blame an entire race of human beings for a virus. When we started tapping into Japanese culture for Ibaraki, I started imagining people in the UK, or the States, or Australia reading traditional Japanese folklore. They'll learn about the cultures around [the myths] and hopefully it'll lead to us having a more open-minded world."

Given that mission statement, Ibaraki is by no means a one-and-done project. Matt promises a second album will happen, saying: "For the next record, I want to go even more traditional, writing songs on traditional instruments and singing in Japanese." He's also working on a tie-in children's book, telling the moralistic stories at the heart of every track. "We need to show the world that we're all similar," he enthuses. "Even if we ate different breakfasts growing up."

IBARAKI ALBUM *RASHOMON* IS OUT ON MAY 6 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

PRESS. IHSAHN. PRESS/BJØRN TORE MOEN. MATT HEAFY FAMILY PHOTO: COURTESY OF MATT HEAFY

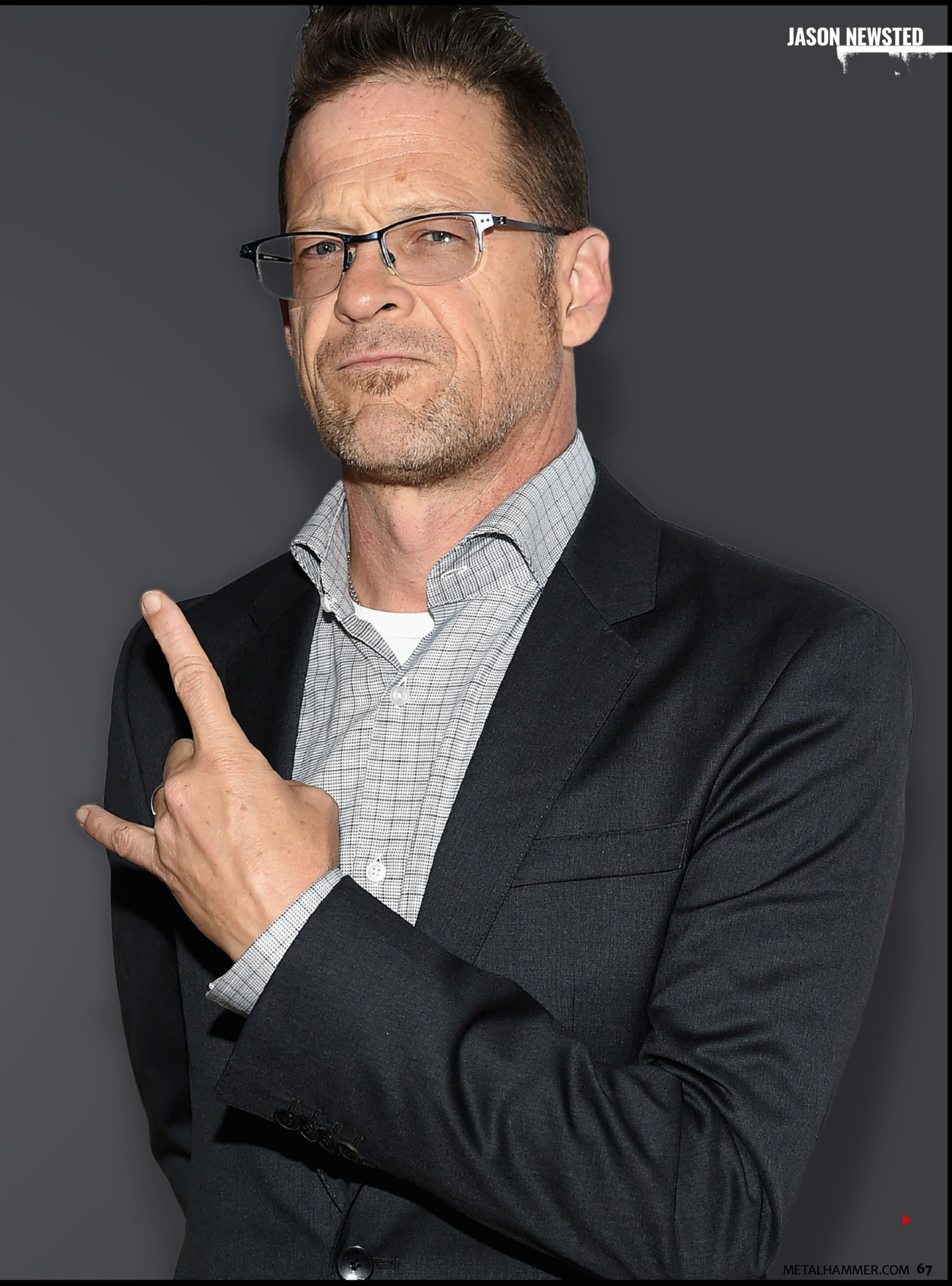
THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

JASON NEWSTED

Metallica fans loved him, he helped write some of the band's biggest hits, and he left it all behind for musical freedom. Would he play with them again? Only if Lars came calling…

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

GETTY



Given he's avoided the spotlight for the last decade, there's an awful lot of love and respect in our scene for Jason Newsted. He was the young, bass-playing hopeful from Flotsam And Jetsam who found himself in the enviable yet daunting position of filling the shoes of Cliff Burton, Metallica's legendary bassist, who passed away in 1986. With such a weight of responsibility upon him, it says much about Jason that he went on to become such an integral and beloved part of the Metallica family, helping to turn them into the biggest metal band of all time.

Yet Jason's boundless energy and commitment to the band took a physical toll, leading him to quit Metallica in 2001. Since then he has led a nomadic existence, playing with everyone from Ozzy Osbourne to Voivod and fronting his own solo project, Newsted, as well as starting an art career that's been remarkably successful. And he's stepped away from the public glare to work at his own Chophouse studio with a revolving door of musicians. But whatever he does or chooses not to do in the future, Jason Newsted's status as an icon is cemented. This, in his words, is how it all happened.

How do you look back on the first Flotsam And Jetsam album, 1986's *Doomsday For The Deceiver*?

"Pridefully and respectfully. I just wish we'd have paid a little more attention to getting the intonation on them Flying Vs… haha! The fucking Arizona weather, you go outside and it's 40 degrees hotter, and you're going '*Clunk-clonk*.' But we made our mark.

"We were setting ourselves up for speed metal, thrash metal, whatever you want to call it – all of our influences were the same. That's how it came from the desert. Anthrax, that's how it came from New York; COC, that's how it came from there [North Carolina]; Texas, Watchtower. For us it was Motörhead, Iron Maiden… those were the ones that made up our shit. So when you wake up and it's 110 degrees in the morning, you might go a little faster, you get a little sweatier! You figure it out."

How did you feel hearing the first mix of *…And Justice For All*, and how do you feel about the *…And Justice For Jason* remixes of the album people have been doing in the last few years?

"I love people's enthusiasm, their determination, their love and their appreciation. If the *Justice* album had been mixed like a regular record, we wouldn't be talking about it to this day. But because that isn't the case – and I don't necessarily think that's that big a deal – we're still talking about it all these years later.

"I don't even think they realised, in their drunken stupor, what they were doing, but they made the best garage band album ever. Black Keys, White Stripes, whatever power duo, garage rock stuff you wanna mention, James and Lars were the original garage rock duo, as far as that goes. They always made the records that way, from [1983 demo cassette] *No Life 'Til Leather*, it was Lars and James, guitar and drums. On the original cassette, in Lars' handwriting, in ink pen, on the label [it reads] 'Turn bass down on stereo.' On *Life 'Til Leather*! It's just been that way their entire lives. They made *Kill 'Em All* that way, *Ride…* that way, *Master Of Puppets* that way… all those two guys in a room, over and over, and you're gonna argue with the most successful of all time…?

"Back then, I was fucking livid, are you kidding me? I was ready for throats, man. Because I thought I did a good job. But, up until it got to Metallica, I had only ever played one take on the bass. In Flotsam I wrote the song on bass and the guitar player covered the part I wrote. I never knew any other way, until I met Bob Rock, and then I could see how he made the bass its own thing. I didn't know what the bass player did until about 15 years ago!"

Did you feel like you had an ally in Bob Rock when you were recording the *Black Album*?

"I don't think I ever earned his respect like he had for James and Lars – because of what they had achieved, and they were writing the cheques – but I think he was firing on all cylinders.

"I wanted to get his respect, to show him I knew what I was doing. I brought in a tenth of my bass collection, 'Hey, let's try this one or this one,' sort of showing off a little, because you get told that this is the way to be a proper musician, where actually it's the opposite. He knew that one bass was malleable and we could get every sound out of it. I started messing with multi-string; he supported me in the way of tough love. He already had five or six kids, and none of us had any kids at that point; he was just adding to his brood. We were just kids, man!"

Did any of you guys realise you were sitting on something special back then, when the record was being made?

"I'm going to go back to *Sad But True*, because that's my highlight of the whole project, because of the weight. I struggled with *Nothing Else Matters*; I knew it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up – it was undeniable – but I was kinda scared of it, to be honest, because I still wanted 'CRUNCH!' *Sandman* I thought was kinda corny, honestly. The beautiful thing was that we all sat in the room together and played it out; 70 takes of *Nothing Else Matters*. After a while, you're too close to it. 'How much more delicate can I make it?'

"It's crazy I've just realised this: our softest song ever took down the biggest walls to allow our hardest songs ever to penetrate the world. When it was No. 1 in 35 countries in one week, and seven of those countries we hadn't even been to yet? Dude, that doesn't happen to a band who go '*Die! Die!*' most of the time."

> **"I THOUGHT *ENTER SANDMAN* WAS KINDA CORNY"**
> JASON NEWSTED

Let's talk about the *Load* period. How aware were you of the controversy surrounding you cutting your hair?

"People are so finickity. I very honestly never gave it one thought. I cut my hair in 1992, they didn't do it till 1996. You know what else is really funny? We start getting to go to more and more countries, and as the borders get a little squirlier, those guys all still have their shaggy [hair]. My hair was nice, sometimes slick… like a cop! And I just cruise right though customs, and those fuckers are looking left and right, James is getting pulled – Lars would get pulled a *lot*. I walk on through and see my buddy and he's got my spliff, and I'm like 'click' and away we go.

"So after a while they see this and, I dunno, I started dating models and Playboy girls, and they're going, 'What the fuck?!' So you see the hair going back and back!"

You had the reputation as being the most metal one in the band at that time as well…

"My record collection was built in those years and it's fucking beautiful, man. And one by one I would invite those musicians up to play with me. Once I built the Chophouse in 1992, it opened me up so much to so many musicians. I would have jam sessions with the guys in Machine Head and Exodus. Sometimes we'd jump away from metal and into other styles, to see if we could play those styles with the same

'crank' as we used in metal. The Sepultura guys became really good friends and they would come down.

"I was just still so hungry to learn about all different styles of music, people who invent their own instruments and sing in different languages, and if I pour as much of this good stuff in, then what's it gonna pull out of me? I still have that to this day. It was important to me to keep the metal in Metallica."

Tell us about the IR8 stuff with Devin Townsend. That's where the problems with Metallica started, right?

"This was the very origins. I had just established the Chophouse in '92, and by '94 we had all the gear. Devin came down at the age of about 22 and was an absolute fucking maniac… dude, an hour-and-a-half of sleep a day for a whole week! And every time he would pick up a guitar you get, '*Widdle widdle widdle*,' and you're like, 'Dude, where in the hell did that come from?! Now play it backwards!' It was the first real project we took time to track in the Chophouse. It's just drums and bass, Devin doing some mad guitar solo over the top, I go in and scream the vocal – done. Raw production, but an incredible accomplishment, because I always wanted my own studio.

"The guys got wind of it and Lars said, 'You gotta come up to the house.' I didn't really know what it was for, so I take my bass and go up there: 'What's up, guys?'

"'Dude, you know you're in Metallica now, don't you? You can't just be making music and sending out tapes to whatever fucker with whichever fucker. You do understand that, right?'

"'Oh!' I didn't realise at all! I didn't know about the politics; I was just sharing some metal with my friends! I pretty much broke down on that day in front of Lars and James. I was like, 'I'm sorry, it won't happen again!' And that was the first time."

You admitted to us that you didn't feel satisfied by being in Metallica at that time. Do you remember that quote?

"I'm proud of myself! That's perfect! Absolutely, that is what is still real for me, and I think it was throughout the 90s. After the *Black Album* tour we had some money, but it was a totally different direction for me. I liked playing the songs and I could raise myself up for the people to play the songs for them. But *Enter Sandman* for the 1,000th time… it kinda wears on you.

"I wanted to be that person who I knew myself to be on and offstage with Metallica. When they saw me, they knew they were getting everything, every fucking ounce of sweat left on that stage. The reason they were getting that, and the way I was able to do that, was because of the wacky music that I was playing offstage with my friends."

Do you feel that Echobrain was overshadowed by you leaving Metallica around that time?

"Certainly, there was already a bunch of cards stacked against it because of that negativity. It was just the project that I had happened to take most seriously; it was never meant to be that I left a big band for that project. So it was a bummer that all of that was on them.

"I wish I could have taken it further, but it was not the catalyst that sent me away from Metallica. The thing that set me away from Metallica is what I call 'the perpetual dis'. No matter how hard I worked, there was still disrespect. Not the hazing that I got from the first six months of my career, but the general disrespect that I got, dismissiveness. The dis and dis, I call it.

"It stemmed from, as a collective and as individuals, [the fact] they had never managed to deal with their grief from Cliff [Burton] when he died. This kind of shit, it manifests itself in young men's minds, young millionaires' minds. Spoilt, spoilt, spoilt millionaires' minds, and I include myself in that… it would be hard to get your head around that. So it

Jason in 1999: more metal than you

GETTY

Playing up: Jason with Metallica in Berlin, 1996

"IF LARS ASKED ME TO THROW DOWN, I'D SAY YES"

JASON NEWSTED

was much more a personal thing. I needed to rest; they refused to give me the time to rest; I had to leave to get that rest."

Ozzy compared you to Geezer, when you played with him in 2003…
"Hard to fathom as well. I liked Red Bull a lot when I came in, so I was bouncing off the walls. I was 40 when I started playing with Ozzy, but he thought I was 26! His comment was, 'You remind me of a young Geezer!' and Black Sabbath had already recorded all of their albums by the time Geezer was 40! But, he was like, 'Whoa! Who is that kid?' I think that's kinda why he said it. When I was trying to learn, he was one of the earliest influences on me. So, whenever I create bass parts, it's always going to have a little bit of Geezer in it."

Did you start getting into creating art when you first had your shoulder injury?
"Yeah, my first surgery was 2004, and I had to find some place to put my energy, and I only had one arm. It was quite a fucked-up period of my life, actually; I was highly addicted to the pain medicine. I had three shoulder surgeries and a knee surgery, and just kinda broke down. The way that I played and lived my life finally took its toll on me. So I had quite a few tests and things over the years in my brain, and had little strokes and stuff. People don't realise the physicality of it.

"I was trying to say to the guys in Metallica, 'I need a minute, please, I need a minute, I'm on these pills…' and they weren't going to give me that minute. So I said very simply, 'If you guys can't give me that time then I need to step away.' And the rest is history. Why would you keep giving yourself strokes?"

When was the last time you listened to a Metallica album that came out after you left the band?
"Never. I heard the one where they made the video in prison [*St. Anger*]. I heard one song with my dad while we were riding in the car in Michigan, because the radio is still pretty wed to Metallica, and it went on for fucking ever. It was eight minutes on the radio, and I went, 'What the fuck are they doing?' No disrespect, but I didn't get it. It was maybe harking back to the longer songs and the aggression and the tempo. And that stuff takes a lot of energy to play, and with James going up and down the fretboard like that, no one can touch it. I have a lot of respect for that thing, but I am quite a distance away from that type of music now.

"I still like my heavy songs, but I sing for real now. I play the bass right up high, sing those backing vocals way up high. I still love Sepultura and stuff… but it really isn't the way that I used to. I'd be happy to join them to do that stuff if they wanted me to. I still talk to Lars a fair bit, and I send him my stuff and he's always super-supportive. I really appreciate it, and I respect his opinion. If he called me and asked if I wanted to throw down, I'd say yes, but I'm not sure if I'd say yes to anyone else."

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For the stories behind the best albums and the bands that produced them...

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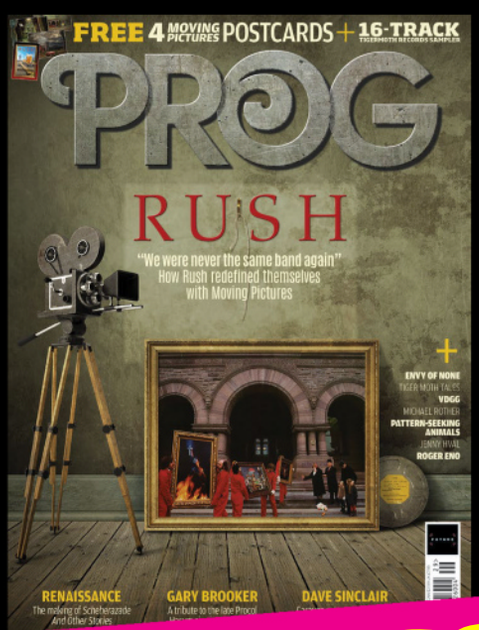

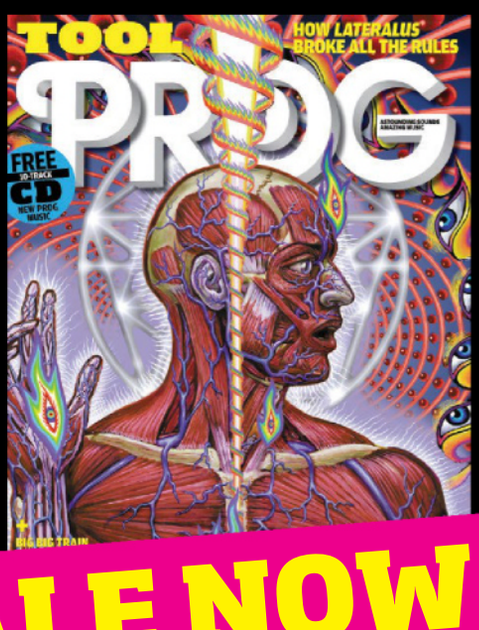

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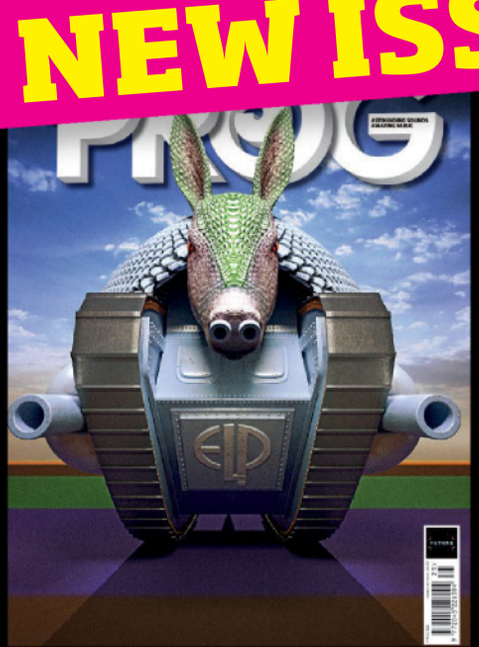

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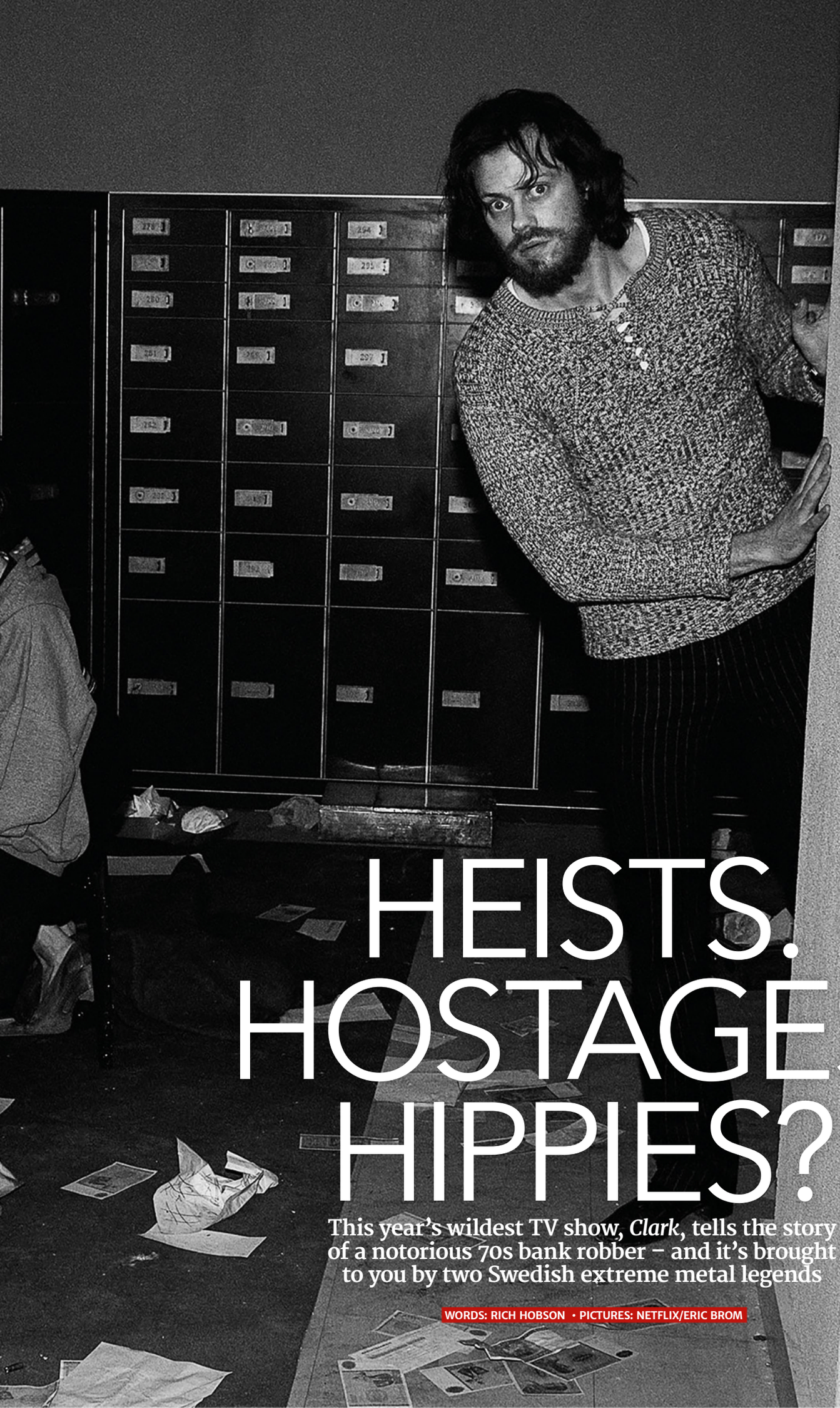
Clark (Bill Skarsgård) and Kicki Enmark (Alicia Agneson) in the show's recreation of the real-life Norrmalmstorg robbery



HEISTS. HOSTAGES. HIPPIES?

This year's wildest TV show, *Clark*, tells the story of a notorious 70s bank robber – and it's brought to you by two Swedish extreme metal legends

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: NETFLIX/ERIC BROM

In 1973, Clark Olofsson became the 'face' of Stockholm Syndrome. A botched robbery at a bank on the city's Norrmalmstorg square had become a six-day stand-off, in which the hostages sided more with their captors (Olofsson and friend Jan-Erik Olsson) than the police who were trying to rescue them.

But Clark Olofsson wasn't just a serial criminal and bank robber – he was one of Sweden's first rock stars. "In the 70s and 80s he was a superstar," says Jonas Åkerlund, who's directed *Clark* – a new Netflix series based on the criminal's life. "Everybody over 40 in Sweden knows who he is, but opinion tends to be split. He looked like a rock star and teens would have posters of him on the wall, but older people remember him being the guy that put fear into people, as nobody knew where he'd pop up."

Though reviled by Sweden's older generation, younger people became smitten with him because he was handsome and charismatic. Jonas says Olofsson bragged that he never had to resort to violence to get what he wanted. "Clark robbed a bank with a Coca-Cola bottle!" Jonas exclaims. "He pretended it was a gun, screaming, 'I'm Clark Olofsson, everybody knows what's happening now!' and everybody just went along with it. That's how famous he was."

But don't get the wrong idea – Olofsson was no Robin Hood. "The only person that thinks Clark Olofsson is like Robin Hood is himself," refutes Jonas. "Nothing good comes from that lifestyle in the end. Some people had a lot of fun, but he also consumed people like crazy."

New series *Clark* charts his wild life and is produced in Swedish. Jonas, who grew up in Stockholm, was well aware of Olofsson at the height of his fame, and had insights into the era that few other directors could offer. He also got a taste of adapting real-life stories when he worked on 2018's *Lords Of Chaos*, exploring the controversial Norwegian black metal scene of the early 90s. But he had two conditions before he signed on the dotted line. "One was to get Bill Skarsgård to play Clark Olofsson," he says, referring to the rising young actor who played Pennywise in the recent *IT* remakes. "The other was, 'I want Mikael Åkerfeldt to write the score.'"

Jonas met fellow countryman and Opeth frontman Mikael in the late 90s, after he'd made a name for himself as a music video director, and had just worked with Madonna on the Grammy Award-winning video for *Ray Of Light*. He was drinking in a small rock bar in Stockholm when a skinny young man approached him and blurted out, "Hey, didn't you used to be in Bathory?"

"He was stunned," Mikael beams today. "This was before the internet, so he couldn't believe that I knew that, especially because everybody else knew him as this big music video director."

More than a decade before Jonas became a big-shot director, he had been the drummer in the earliest line-up of the pioneering proto-black metal band. Back then, he was going by the name 'Vans McBurger' (no, really) and wasn't thinking about his long-term prospects. In his spare time, though, he began learning about editing, and had what he calls a "near-religious epiphany". "I thought I was going to play drums forever," he admits. "But when I started working with images and sound, I knew it was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life."

Despite the career change, Jonas remained active in metal circles, making videos for bands including Candlemass and Metallica. But back in Stockholm, all Mikael cared about was the fact he was standing next to the original drummer from Bathory.

After that night, the pair hung out whenever Jonas was back in Stockholm from his other home in Los Angeles. The director would host parties and invite "musicians, DJs, writers – artistic types", as Mikael puts it, to hang out, drink beer and listen to metal. "It's middle-aged white men bonding!" Jonas says. "It always ends with air guitar and my smoke machine coming out and all that stuff. But Mikael's knowledge of music is so fucking deep. I have known a lot of music fanatics – professors and critical black belts – and I think Mikael trumps them all."

When Jonas asked Mikael to score *Clark*, the musician immediately accepted – even though he'd never worked on a soundtrack before. "One of my favourite things in the world is writing music, regardless of context," Mikael explains. "As soon as Jonas said he was doing the series, I thought, 'Yeah, you're the perfect guy to do it.' He always finds humour in the most bizarre things, and you'll see that throughout. It's a crazy series – you won't fall asleep watching it!"

With a larger-than-life character at its centre and plenty of insane stories to pick from, the trailer for *Clark* suggests a Martin Scorsese-style crime/comedy in the vein of *The Wolf Of Wall Street*. But Jonas says the tone is not so cut and dried. "It's almost like a cartoon version of this dark story," he explains. "It has no proper genre; we go from high to lows, from funny to dark. Clark's whole life is a rise and fall. He's got a lot of self-destructive behaviour; the minute his life looks good, he fucks it up."

Caught by the fuzz: Clark (centre) with the police, Hiller (Daniel Hallberg, left) and Tommy Lindström (Vilhelm Blomgren, right)

On scoring duties: Mikael Åkerfeldt

MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT: PRESS/JONAS ÅKERLUND

Girlfriend Maria (Hanna Björn) visiting Clark in prison

"TEENS HAD POSTERS OF CLARK ON THEIR WALLS"

JONAS ÅKERLUND

Starting with Clark Olofsson's birth in 1947 and going right up to 1982 ("We'd originally planned to do the series right up to present day, but there was too much story!" Jonas admits), *Clark* needed a soundtrack that could indicate the passage of time. American movies such as *Forrest Gump* use big pop and rock songs from across the decades, and Jonas was determined that *Clark*'s soundtrack should be based almost exclusively on Swedish music, along with the score.

That meant Mikael had to branch out even further than the prog, folk and extreme metal influences apparent in Opeth. For *Clark*, he's created classical compositions, as well as exploring jazz in the form of big band and bebop, and the stranger corners of Sweden's musical history – including an early 70s version of Swedish prog that he describes as "effectively communist propaganda".

"It's not like England, where prog rock was Genesis and King Crimson. A lot of those records sound like dogshit because it was more about getting a message across," he says. "So when Jonas asked me for some weird music for a scene involving hippies, I had a lot of fun drawing from that scene to make the worst piece of music you've ever heard, ha ha!"

He may be self-deprecating, but Jonas couldn't be happier with the results. "I'm telling you, the score is fantastic," he enthuses. "Mikael's score drives the emotional beats. I challenged him to do stuff that's really out of his comfort zone, so some of the music sounds very Opeth and some of the time you can't believe it's him, but he's got his fingerprint on it."

Mikael ended up creating more than 100 compositions for *Clark*, which he now plans to streamline and release separately. "My first solo record!" he enthuses. "My favourite songs are the ones that sound nothing like anything I've done before, though I'm not sure what the value of that is to an Opeth fan. There's disco in

Clark charts Clark Olofsson's stormy life... or at least some of it

"*BLACKWATER PARK* FANS WILL HATE THE DISCO MUSIC!"

MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

this – I think *Blackwater Park* fans will hate that! But it's not about my tastes – it's serving the series."

Now Mikael's tried composing, he's developed a taste for it. Considering where similar pivots have led the likes of Thom Yorke, Trent Reznor and Danny Elfman over the years, could we be looking at a future Oscar nominee?

"I wasn't much of a soundtrack guy before this – *Rocky IV* is my favourite!" laughs Mikael. "But I've been watching films more closely – we went to see *Joker* and that has a great soundtrack, as does the series *Chernobyl*. I'd love to be the house guy for Jonas. My dream, now that I *can* dream about writing for film, would be to work on something dark – a thriller or horror that's closer to my movie taste."

As for *Clark*, it's a thrill-ride of colourful stories that are as close as we're likely to get to the real Clark (see right). With 30 more years of his life left to document, will there be a season two? "I'm a little Clark-ed out at this point!" Jonas laughs. "By the end of the series I think most people will be like, 'Get this guy out of my sight.' But there's definitely a story for it, so who knows?" Bring on the 80s soundtrack... MH

CLARK IS OUT VIA NETFLIX ON MAY 5. OPETH PLAY LONDON'S EVENTIM APOLLO ON NOVEMBER 18

"BASED ON TRUTH AND LIES"

Jonas Åkerlund used this tagline for *Lords Of Chaos*, his film about the 90s black metal scene... So how did it end up on *Clark* as well?

WHY DID YOU USE THE SAME TAGLINE ON BOTH PROJECTS?
"This is actually the third time I've used it – it was on my first movie, [2002's] *Spun*, as well. It's the idea of 'based on a real-life story... sort of.' With *Lords Of Chaos*, I knew there were going to be strong opinions about it. There's a bunch of experts who say, 'I know this story better than anybody else.' The thing is, they all have different stories! Each has a different truth. So my thinking is, 'That's your truth; well, this is *my* truth. And then somewhere else is what actually happened.'"

AND HOW DID THIS PLAY OUT WITH *CLARK*?
"With something like *Clark*, that's the easy part - we know a few things for sure, like dates, times and places. But what happened in those times? Who truly remembers the details of something that happened 40 or 30 years ago? So rather than say 'loosely based on' or trying to get it perfect – which will never happen – I feel like there's a directness in just saying 'based on truth and lies' that gives me freedom as a writer and director to expand a bit."

HOW DOES DOING THIS HELP YOU TO CREATE YOUR WORK?
"I write and direct six hours of a drama, and by the end of it I don't remember which bits were completely factual and which bits we came up with ourselves. But I'd rather live in that world – it's a lot more fun!"

JONAS ÅKERLUND: PRESS/ HENRIK HALVARSSON

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: STEPHANIE CABRAL

Rammstein clock in for another bout of industrial adventurism

BRYAN ADAMS/UNIVERSAL MUSIC/PRESS

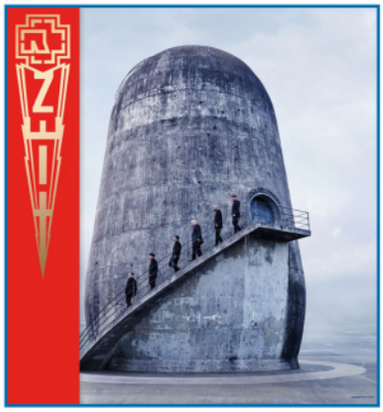
RAMMSTEIN

Zeit

SPINEFARM/UNIVERSAL

Germany's world-conquering firestarters display a little tenderness

THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC hasn't given us much to be grateful for, but we might have to thank it for giving us a new Rammstein album. The German megastars did say that the wait between records wouldn't be as long as the decade between 2009's *Liebe Ist Für Alle Da* and 2019's untitled album. Even so, *Zeit* arrives hot on the heels of its predecessor. But the trauma of these last couple of years doesn't appear to have been lost on Rammstein, with much of the record showing these larger-than-life, fire-breathing German superstars in a more contemplative mood, often expressing an acute awareness of the fragility of life and their own mortality.



Sonically speaking, *Zeit* could only be the work of one band; Rammstein have the strongest, most distinct identity of any metal artist. All of the touchpoints of their sound are present and correct, from the grinding guitars to the low vocals. But although they haven't fucked with the formula, they've at least roughed it up a bit. After opener *Armee der Tristen* rides along on typical Rammstein Sturm und Drang drama, coloured by some Depeche Mode-style synths, the band dramatically drop the pace for a couple of numbers. With its delicate piano and a crooning vocal performance from Till Lindemann, as he mourns the cruelty of the passing of time, the balladic title track – and first single – shows remarkable restraint and beauty for Rammstein, while the sombre *Schwarz* again uses soft piano keys to create its main hook.

It's not a massive shock to the system, but a legendary band with such clear characteristics opening the album in such an unusually minimalistic way – by Rammstein's imperious standards at least – deserves praise.

After that, the album leans far more into classic Rammstein territory. *Giftig* is a stomping, chugging mechanical beast in the vein of *Du Hast*, second single *Zick Zack* mixes their Teutonic riffs with a disco beat à la *Ausländer*, and the fantastic *OK* is a full-throttle rager in the manner of *Mutter*'s *Links 2 3 4* – but with a massive choir that makes it soar, and a closing guitar groove reminiscent of Dimebag Darrell. Then there's *Dicke Titten* (*Big Tits*), led by leaden riff and featuring a cheeky oompah refrain. Yes, you could say that you've heard songs of this ilk before, but each of them can comfortably stand shoulder to shoulder with anything in Rammstein's back catalogue.

There is one last shock on the penultimate track, *Lügen*. It starts slowly and builds to a huge, cranking crescendo, where Till's vocals are heavily autotuned. It's a tool that pop and hip hop artists have been using for well over a decade now, but metal bands have, broadly speaking, steered well clear of its Marmite-y charms. But if the notion of Rammstein channelling T-Pain might sound like the worst idea ever to some fans, you have to give the band credit for experimenting.

ZEIT OFTEN EXPRESSES AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF THE FRAGILITY OF LIFE

The album closes on another reflective number: the cold piano chimes and propulsive march of *Adieu*. Till chillingly signs off with: *'Adieu, goodbye, auf Wiedersehen/You have to go the final way alone'*. Rammstein in 2022 can still singe your face with the full force of their attack, but on *Zeit* they prove more than ever that they aren't afraid to peel away their layers, lay bare their fears, and show you their scars.

FOR FANS OF: KMFDM, Depeche Mode, Killing Joke

STEPHEN HILL

HALESTORM

BACK FROM THE DEAD

ATLANTIC

Lzzy Hale's high-end rockers get a post-Covid power surge

FOR A LONG TIME there were two Halestorms: the live beast and the slick, comparatively sanitised recorded entity. The former version earned them a mighty, mosh-pit-friendly reputation. The latter put them on the radio and won them a Grammy. On 2018's *Vicious*, they finally brought their live chops into the studio in a meaningful way. Now reunited with producer Nick Raskulinecz (of Mastodon, Evanescence and Code Orange fame, among others), they've gone a few steps further, galvanising a pandemic's worth of pent-up demons and pouring them into their heaviest record yet.

Where *Vicious* was angry, *Back From The Dead* is *livid*. There are raw, tortured sentiments with furious chops and beats to match. It's shiny (even with the live edge, Halestorm records still come with a decent helping of gloss) but brutal. It's very loud.

"THERE ARE RAW, TORTURED SENTIMENTS WITH FURIOUS CHOPS AND BEATS TO MATCH"

You couldn't call it 'easy listening,' although it avoids the morosely confessional vibe of some Covid-era releases. And crucially, because this is Halestorm we're talking about, it's all hinged on songs: proper sing-your-larynx-to-shreds songs.

The titular opening track sets the tone with rivers of riffy hellfire, unleashing Lzzy Hale like something from Satan's lair. It's as if Ronnie James Dio and Maria Brink had a baby and set it on fire… or something. It's the most squarely 'metaaal' they've ever sounded on record, and for all Lzzy's deeply personal performances – and there are a lot of them on this record – it's no one-woman show. There's more of everything, from everyone. More screams. More extremes. More killer solos

PRESS

A relentless, powerful call to arms from Halestorm

from Joe Hottinger. More deft, thunderous assaults from Arejay Hale (just Lzzy's kid brother dicking around with giant drumsticks? Not so much), with bassist Josh Smith anchoring the whole affair like a boss.

Lyrically it pulls no punches. You'll find barbed shots at industry misogyny in *Bombshell* (*'Be a good girl, play along/ wear your short skirt, sing your song'*), dark sarcasm in *Brightside* (*'I'll keep looking on the bright side of life/'cos it only gets darker'*) and uncaged mental anguish in *Psycho Crazy* (*'If you want crazy, I'll give you psycho'*). At times it borders on relentless, but in a way that's the point; this is a powerful set of songs that aren't afraid to get real.

And, of course, there are slivers of light. *Terrible Things* is bathed in glowy strings. Closer *Raise Your Horns* is all piano and voice: a love letter to the world that Lzzy and Arejay have inhabited since they were kids. And single *The Steeple* is a rousing, metalhead call-to-arms that fans will adore. It's the sort of outcast community statement that Halestorm are masters of, with Lzzy in the centre like a benevolent hard rock cult leader – only, erm, not corrupt or scary.

If you want beer-drinking music, *Back From The Dead* is not it. But if it's a hard-hitting yet catchy dose of catharsis you seek – an intense, ultimately restorative tonic after such a strange couple of years – turn it up and dive straight in.

FOR FANS OF: **Evanescence, In This Moment, Rage Against The Machine**

POLLY GLASS

ALUNAH
Strange Machine
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Reconfigured doom/psych rockers glimpse a summer of love

These West Midlands doom merchants have employed a revolving door policy when it comes to bandmembers of late, but what has remained constant is their skill for penning robust, psych- and goth-tinged rockers. Album six, their second with singer Siân Greenaway and first with guitarist Matt Noble, sees them deliver their most exciting collection of songs yet. Fret wizard Ritchie Blackmore's shadow looms over the likes of the title track and *Fade Into Fantasy*, while the gloom-laden single *The Earth Spins*, which boasts guitars from Crowbar's Shane Wesley, bludgeons with the best of them. Best of all is the flower power-flavoured, flute-featuring freak-out, *Psychedelic Expressway*.

FOR FANS OF: **Royal Thunder, Witch Mountain, Saint Vitus**

EDWIN McFEE

ANVIL
Impact Is Imminent
AFM

Canada's heavy metal heroes still wave the flag proudly after 44 years

Anvil's 19th album is part fist-in-the-air triumphant heavy metal of the kind they've been championing for over 40 years, part passages of ploddiness that sit in the gut like a wheel of mouldy cheese. *Ghost Shadow*, *Wizard's Wand*, *Teabag* and *Gomez* evoke heavy metal's finest moments via *Painkiller*-era Priest, Uriah Heep and early Van Halen instrumental jams. Unfortunately, *Lockdown* is so simplistic it makes Spinal Tap sound like Public Enemy: further proof old-school bands should avoid singing about the pandemic. Thankfully, the gems outweigh the cheese, Anvil putting their expertise to full use in another triumphant outing for the heavy metal band that could.

FOR FANS OF: **Saxon, Judas Priest, Hammerfall**

RICH HOBSON

AUDREY HORNE
Devil's Bell
NAPALM

More big-riffing bravado from Bergen's classic rockers

Named after a character from the infamous drama *Twin Peaks*, Audrey Horne have roots buried in the Norwegian black metal scene. But just like countrymen Enslaved, whose guitarist Arve 'Ice Dale' Isdal doubles up in both bands, for the past two decades the quintet have served as an escape valve to let off steam in a far more tuneful way. Their seventh album takes its cues from the giant, stadium-filling rock of the 70s and 80s. The result is a granite-hard monolith of tunefulness, with rowdy, lighter-waving anthems such as *Animal*, *Toxic Twins* and *Break Out* – the latter a distant cousin of Dio's *We Rock* and Ozzy Osbourne's *Shot In The Dark* – which are accompanied by lashings of red-hot twin-lead guitars.

FOR FANS OF: **Thin Lizzy, Graveyard, Danko Jones**

DAVE LING

Cage Fight pull no punches on their debut album

CAGE FIGHT

Cage Fight

CANDLELIGHT

Incendiary hardcore thrash from an unexpected source

WHAT YOU ARE about to hear may shock you: musicians don't just play one style of music. Take James Monteith, for example, well-known as one-fifth of prog-metal outfit Tesseract. For the most part, his music career has seen him playing a major role in the rise of the more technical subgenres of metal that include the explosion of the djent movement in the early 2010s, but Cage Fight's self-titled debut album sees him take on the riff in a more direct manner – one of the thrashier variety. Along with former Eths vocalist Rachel Aspe, bassist Jon Reid and drummer Nick Plews, the London hellraisers are aiming to give people their gnarliest listen for a while with their debut album, and it's one that starts before you even hit play on the record; yes, that artwork is no Photoshop trickery, but an actual tattoo on someone's actual hand, that's been done by Rachel herself.

What follows is three quarters of an hour of pummelling hardcore that regularly dips into groove and thrash metal territory, never affording listeners a chance to breathe, with a number of the songs segueing into the next. At its foundation is a thunderous amount of riffs and breakdowns that will incite pits up and down the country on future tour dates, with James executing a number of skin-shredding solos like *Shine Don't Fade*. The clean gang vocals in *Hope Castrated* and *Make A Decision* are a call to arms in every respect, The Black Dahlia Murder frontman Trevor Strnad pops up on *Eating Me Alive* to provide his own indomitable pipes in the mix, and the closing cover of Body Count's *Bitch In The Pit* is an inspired choice of song.

The star of the album, though, is Rachel, whose throat-ripping delivery captures the anger and emotions that have been poured into this recording through the events of the last two years. Given James's main project, how frequently Cage Fight can write new music and tour remains to be seen, but as a starter for 10, this is an absolute rager.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Lamb Of God, Terror

ELLIOT LEAVER

CALIBAN

Dystopia

CENTURY MEDIA

Metalcore long-haulers power up their emotional rollercoaster

Caliban's 13th release is a dark, heavy effort from a band still pushing their melodic metalcore sound forward. There are a generous amount of solid tracks here and the feeling of hope runs alongside anger throughout. *Phantom Pain* is craftily uplifting, *Alien* offers a sea of melodic layers, the clean vocals of Annisokay's Christoph Wieczorek on the title track help blend groove and aggression, and *Dragon*, featuring Job For A Cowboy's Jonny Davy, is a rollercoaster of the crushing, soothing and creepy. However, it's the sheer force and emotional pull of *VirUS*, which features Heaven Shall Burn's Marcus Bischoff, that lifts *Dystopia* to the next level.

FOR FANS OF: Parkway Drive, As I Lay Dying, Darkest Hour

NIK YOUNG

CELESTIAL SEASON

Mysterium I

BURNING WORLD

Well-travelled Dutchmen return to their gloriously gloomy roots

On paper it doesn't make sense. Celestial Season authored 1993's underrated masterpiece of gloom, *Forever Scarlet Passion*, then drifted unexpectedly towards stoner rock before disbanding, only for their frontman to become a well-known breakcore DJ. And yet, with 2020's *The Secret Teachings*, they've managed to return to their roots. The first record in a projected series of three, *Mysterium I* repeats its predecessor's feat by knowing when to restrain itself while forging a path between doom/death recalling *Gothic*-era Paradise Lost and classic rock arrangements, enhanced by a discreet yet harrowing string quartet. A classy return.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, My Dying Bride, Arvo Pärt

OLIVIER BADIN

CELLARDOOR

A Place For Torment And Pain

SELF-RELEASED

Fresh-faced Belgians find themselves in limbo

A lot of credit must be given to this Belgian quartet for creating a confident concept, image and debut album having formed just two years ago. Centred around the nine circles of Hell and seven deadly sins, *A Place For Torment And Pain* aims to do something unique on each track, from venomous opener *Invidia/Envy*'s spite to the melancholic synths of *Luxuria/Lust*. There are certainly motifs of both the nu metal and metalcore styles that they proclaim to fall under, from brutish beatdowns to an appreciation of Korn's bounce and darker moments that befits the gloomy context. However, while there are a lot of interesting moments to admire, very little of CellarDoor's execution makes a lasting impression once *Avaritia/Avarice* draws to a close.

FOR FANS OF: Emmure, Attila, Suicide Silence

ADAM REES

ANDY FORD/PRESS

CLEAVER
No More Must Crawl
KLONOSPHERE

Gallic trio put the grit, the grind and the grime back into hardcore

The moment you press play on this French trio's debut, you're greeted with an intense flurry of discordant, howling noise. If you suspect an attempt to get your attention early before settling into something more manageable, think again. Cleaver deal in that sound and intense delivery that early 00s hardcore/grindcore mashup artists like Burnt By The Sun excelled in. The band themselves cite that era as an influence, namechecking Poison The Well and Botch, but those bands did deploy the odd passage of melody. With the exception of the opening of *Inner Voice* and the middle of *Thudding Stares*, there are no such concessions here. This is an impressively visceral opening statement.

FOR FANS OF: Burnt By The Sun, Magrudergrind, Portrayal Of Guilt

STEPHEN HILL

THE DARK ALAMORTÉ
Lunacrium Thepsis
UNIQUE LEADER

Modern death/black debutants bite off more than they can chew

This LA group's debut is certainly ambitious, fusing symphonic death metal, atmospheric black metal and pristine modern deathcore over a dense 77 minutes, complete with an elaborate conceptual backstory and dramatic spoken-word interludes. It has its moments – opener proper *Cast Into Froth*'s yearning keys and emotive melodeath create a genuine sense of melancholy – but as a whole, *Lunacrium Thepsis* feels bloated, with its various influences often working against each other. The pit-ready breakdowns in songs like *A Loathing Tomb* detract from the gloomy, nocturnal atmosphere rather than enhance it, and the album loses momentum as it progresses, its dynamic 10-minute title track notwithstanding. There's potential here, and this is more interesting than your average deathcore LP, but some careful editing would have made for a much more powerful experience.

FOR FANS OF: Fleshgod Apocalypse, Nile, The Monolith Deathcult

KEZ WHELAN

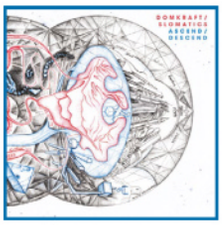
DEVIL MASTER
Ecstasies Of Never Ending Night
RELAPSE

Philadelphia's black metal punks keep feeling the darkness

Everything about Devil Master rules. From their wickedly ghoulish blend of black metal and vampiric punk, to the fact that their drummer operates under the name Festering Terror In Deepest Catacomb, the Philly quartet's cross-pollinated malevolence is hard to resist. *Ecstasies...* builds on the evil clangour of 2019's *Satan Spits On Children Of Light*, spiking that potent, genre-warping brew with bigger hooks and plenty of gothic grandeur. When hurtling along at a feverish full pelt, Devil Master are as destructive as any more traditional black metal band; *Enamoured In The Throes Of Death* and *Precious Blood Of Christ Rebuked* are electrifying bursts of grubby violence, elevated by shards of ornate melody. Even more satisfying are surging post-punk tirades like the closing *Never Ending Night*, wherein Devil Master sound truly bewitched and simply unstoppable.

FOR FANS OF: Tribulation, Hellripper, Misfits

DOM LAWSON



DOMKRAFT/ SLOMATICS
Ascend/Descend
MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN

Doom-sludge wizards trade spells across the Scando-Irish aether

Belfast's Slomatics' latest split partners are Swedish psychonauts Domkraft, and their more overtly psychedelic sound is a nice contrast to the Irish trio's crushing fuzz. Domkraft kick off with the eight-minute *The Core Will Pull You Home*. It's a sun-scorched fusion of lumbering doom riffs, spiralling reverb-swamped guitar leads and histrionic vocals that comes across like a breezier Ufomammut fronted by a deranged street preacher. Covers of Stereolab and Slomatics' *And Yet it Moves* follow. Slomatics venture into unexpectedly melodic and grandiose territory with *Positive Runes*, augmenting their hefty riffs with sweeping keys as drummer/vocalist Marty adopts a more dramatic croon compared to his usual bark. They tackle Domkraft's *Dustrider* too, making its ominous riffs even heavier and akin to early Cathedral. Both bands push the other out of their comfort zone, with intriguing results.

FOR FANS OF: Conan, YOB, Bongripper

KEZ WHELAN

Cave In have found a new path forward

CAVE IN
Heavy Pendulum
RELAPSE

Massachusetts' mercurial adventurers recharge after tragedy

DESPITE BEING PART of the wave of bands – Converge, Dillinger Escape Plan, Botch et al – who helped shape modern metalcore, Cave In have always been a more chimerical beast than those with whom they rose through the ranks. Where others held tight to a distinctive sound, vision or aesthetic, Cave In chose to flit between ideas and styles. It's a trait that was frustrating or fascinating depending on your personal viewpoint, and one that might have secured ardent support, but also meant they'd never achieve world domination.

It's true to trend-bucking, head-scratching form, then, that the band have dropped what could be their mightiest – as well as their longest – work 27 years into their stop-start career. Like other albums before it (looking at you, *Perfect Pitch Black*), *Heavy Pendulum* seeks to reconcile the multiple realms the band have inhabited over the years, uniting serrated metal, grunge, prog, post-hardcore and space-rock in the most cohesive and crunchingly convincing manner to date. The weight, heft and attack are shatteringly distinctive on first listen, as are the snaking melodies that twist and twine through the record's many crevices like probing alien tendrils. It's the layers between, however, that knit it all together and make things so rewarding, from the squelch'n'burble of *Careless Offering* to closing track *Wavering Angel*'s delicate acoustic latticework and seemingly boundless scope.

As you'd expect, the influence and spirit of the late Caleb Scofield permeates the album, from riffs and lyrics he'd penned through to the band's own meditations on their fallen friend. Nate Newton (Converge, Old Man Gloom) has stepped in on bass, and the fit feels natural given the close bonds between all concerned. *Heavy Pendulum*, then, ultimately fulfils two functions: as a soaring testament to a lost ally, but also a reconfiguration – as though the band charged themselves with making something fresh, bold and exciting from their patchwork of sloughed-off skins.

FOR FANS OF: Mutoid Man, Failure, Soundgarden

ALEX DELLER

JAY ZUCCO/PRESS

Fozzy: *Relax*, don't do it. Seriously.

FOZZY

Boombox

MASCOT

Chris Jericho's buffed-up rockers land a few body slams

POOR OLD FOZZY. It seems like their fight to be recognised by the more discerning metal buff is harder than one of Chris Jericho's tussles in the ring. Sure, it's easy to mock these dudes when Jericho is auto-tuned up to his eyeballs, and there is a pervasive nod to nu metal throughout their sonic portfolio. Yet within that gleaming pile of over-processed bro metal fodder lies a swathe of catchy-as-hell tunes that deserves at least a passing glance.

Boombox, Fozzy's eighth studio offering, is an album of highly stylised, somewhat brainless but ultimately very catchy metal packed with layers of artificially enhanced riffs and electronic elements crafted for mass consumption. Bruising behemoth *Sane* is a rock club classic in the making, boasting the best of Rich Ward's gargantuan riffs. Matching *Sane* on its hookiness is *Nowhere To Run*, an uncomplicated track begging for radio airplay. Likewise, *Purifier* is a simple yet effective crotch-rocket of a track lifted by Ward's nods to Mötley Crüe riffage. Meanwhile *Omen*, for all of Jericho's schlock horror lyricism, not only has an insanely catchy chorus but benefits from producer Johnny Andrews' electronic brushstrokes. Even the rappy moments are forgiveable when you have melodies this infectious, especially on the sauntering songcraft of *What Hell Is Like*.

For all of *Boombox*'s merits there are, unfortunately, some clangers. *I Still Burn* sounds like it is one step away from being remixed into an Avicii-style dancefloor filler; country-inspired ballad *Army of One* feels gratuitous; while their cover of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Relax* is utterly toe-curling. But then again, when else are you going to hear an Undisputed WWF Champion singing about the careful art of delayed ejaculation? Cerebral, introspective metal this is not, but Fozzy know how to write catchy metal-lite for the masses and *Boombox*, whether you like it or not, is full of it.

FOR FANS OF: **Ozzy Osbourne, Puddle Of Mudd, Halestorm**

HOLLY WRIGHT

ECSTATIC VISION

Elusive Mojo

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Philadelphia's cosmic jam crew rev up their engines

Philadelphia's frenetic psych rock voyagers return with their fourth studio campaign – seven high-energy freakouts, bursting with all the druggy, spaced-out jamming you've come to expect. There's little question that *The Kenzo Shake*, with its superfuzz riffs and skyscraping solos, will absolutely smoke in a live setting. Driven by a mesmerising tempo and cortex-scraping saxophone solo, *Times Up* (sic) feels like Monster Magnet and Morphine making a blood pact while tripping on mescaline. At times the improvisational elements feel a bit overindulgent, casting a generic pall across tracks like *Venom*. Overall, however, EV's latest effort convincingly bottles the cosmic vibes of a revved-up psychedelic shakedown.

FOR FANS OF: **Earthless, Nebula, Radio Moscow**

JOE DALY

EVERGREY

A Heartless Portrait (The Orphean Testament)

NAPALM

Progressive Swedes celebrate their 25th anniversary in style

It's a case of lucky 13 for Gothenburg's experienced prog-metal-meets-goth outfit. Evergrey crafted one of the finest records of their career in 2021's *Escape Of The Phoenix*. Their latest continues this process, putting further daylight between the five-piece and a slightly sticky period. Evergrey's raison d'être is the telling of stories, and in Tom Englund they boast a raconteur par excellence. His strong, clean voice soars majestically above Henrik Danhage's pummelling guitars, the symphonic, ear-caressing keyboards of Rikard Zander and those bruising yet often choral-sounding arrangements. This is classy stuff. After a quarter of a century, Evergrey really should be better-known than they are.

FOR FANS OF: **Circus Maximus, Fates Warning, Vanden Plas**

DAVE LING

FAMYNE

II: The Ground Below

SVART

Gloom and beauty spotted in Canterbury

It's just a hairdo after all, but it's hard not to think of Martin Spear, of cult early 90s British heroes Sevenchurch, when watching frontman Tom Vane's bowl cut in the Canterbury lads' last video for the track *For My Sins*. Questionable coiffure aside, although separated by three decades, both bands share a love for long, epic songs and immaculate doom with an undeniable British flair. Yet the comparison stops there as Famyne, named apparently after an Opeth song, aren't afraid to pour their hearts out. Boosted by delicate progressive arrangements and a highly talented singer, *II: The Ground Below* is a gorgeous and poignant progressive doom statement.

FOR FANS OF: **Opeth, Anathema, Sevenchurch**

OLIVIER BADIN

PRESS

FREJA
Tides
BABYLON DOOM CULT

An absorbing new vision from the Dutch black metal birthing pool

Netherlands black metal duo Freja formed after a halcyon moment for the Dutch black metal scene at Roadburn 2019: namely Maalstroom, a special performance featuring members of Fluisteraars, Turia and Verwoed, among others. Two of the performers, Laster's W. and C. of Witte Wieven forged a bond through a shared love of atmospheric BM. Their vocal duet on their debut is its most striking quality, harnessing the full spectrum of their male/female, clean/harsh range. At its starkest in the likes of *Cataclysm*, C.'s unbound operatics are the high to W.'s savage lows. Melodic flourishes are tossed in ever-undulating swells of hungry speed and mid-paced power on an absorbing record inspired by ancient mythos. *Tides* is a polished meeting point of reverence and anguish.

FOR FANS OF: Drudkh, Fen, Wolves In The Throne Room

TOM O'BOYLE

THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE ZUGLY
Research And Destroy
FYSISK FORMAT

Norwegian punk rockers scuff up another stretch of asphalt

These Norwegian gutterpunks have a rich heritage of Scandi-rock to live up to. Everyone from Turbonegro to Kvelertak have helped establish Norway as one of the most reliable fountains of greasy, clattering, careering rock'n'roll over the last few decades. Five albums in, and with the DNA that makes this genre continue to sound so vital, TGTBATZ are providing more evidence that this country just does it better than anyone else. *Research And Destroy* is only 34 minutes long, it does absolutely nothing new or original at all, but you'll be hard-pressed to remain still when you listen to it. This music isn't broke and it doesn't need fixing; it's 10 tracks of curled-lip, shit-kicking, non-stop, adrenaline-inducing punk rock. Job very much done.

FOR FANS OF: Barren Womb, Turbonegro, Supersuckers

STEPHEN HILL

HELPLESS
Caged In Gold
CHURCH ROAD

All-encompassing nihilism from the south-west UK wastelands

Helpless's vicious blend of grind, metal and powerviolence has been burning a hole in the UK underground for almost five years now, and this second slab of aural abuse could be what tips them towards huge things. True to form, *Caged In Gold* is a truly visceral experience – a seething mess of bloodthirsty riffs, discordant noise and Dan Couch's primal screams. Wasting zero time, the trio lay down a gauntlet of blackened riffs and cacophonous rhythms via the nihilistic one-two punch of *Wraiths Of Memory* and *The Empty Gesture* – the latter plunging its listener into a deeper pit of fury by its conclusion. Elsewhere, a couple of songs inject a few melodic guitars into the maelstrom, while epic-by-comparison closer *The Great Silence* consistently engages by virtue of its gnarled ferocity. *Caged In Gold* is guaranteed to melt faces off from a mile away.

FOR FANS OF: Full Of Hell, Pig Destroyer, Converge

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

I AM THE NIGHT
While The Gods Are Sleeping
SVART

Finnish death-doom veterans swear to the black

Emerging through the mists of Finland's ancient southern forest come I Am The Night, a quartet of grizzled veterans including present and former members of Insomnium, Omnium Gatherum and Paradise Lost. You'd be forgiven for expecting a big, heaping bowl of melodic death but instead, this debut unleashes a battering black metal assault. *Hear Me O' Unmaker* and *The Owl* exemplify how deftly the band maintain dizzying levels of precision while tapping into something both thrilling and instinctively primal. Stacked with hellish riffs and icy atmospherics, *Among The Unseen Ones* showcases an exhilarating immediacy and when vocalist Okko Solanterä screams *'Ave Satanas!'* at *Dawnbearer*'s electrifying climax, even the grimmest kvlt purists will be hard-pressed to keep from grinning. An utterly phenomenal collection that sounds more like the work of a band five albums deep into their career.

FOR FANS OF: Watain, Stormruler, Behexen

JOE DALY

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

BLACKGOLD
Blackgold
KARTEL MUSIC GROUP

There's not much info about Blackgold, but if you like the kind of street strutting hardcore/hip hop crossover of TRC mixed with some of nu metal's heavier elements, then you're going enjoy this. Catchy, bouncy, aggro fun.

STEPHEN HILL

COMA HOLE
Coma Hole
SELF-RELEASED

The debut EP from this Rhode Island drums and bass duo merges prog, doom and grunge into a thundering stoner brew. Completed by mystical, cut-through-the-gloom vocals, it's an enticing invitation to a new voodoo.

DANNII LEIVERS

GILT
Conceit
SMARTPUNK

A mix of post-hardcore, noise rock and math come together well on this sophomore EP centred around the theme of grief with a guest vocalist on each track. This Floridian duo are sparkling with potential.

ELLIOT LEAVER

GUERILLA WARFARE
Control EP
WRECKORDS

This Kentucky three-piece bring frantic rap metal with distinctive vocals, thrilling fretwork, and equal parts rage and swagger. All 20 minutes here are strong and well worthy of the exemplary first single, *MuLLigaN*.

NIK YOUNG

SICKSENSE
Kings Today
SELF-RELEASED

The Agonist vocalist Vicky Psarakis and husband-cum-Stuck Mojo frontman Robby J Fonts join forces here for five tracks of groove-laden thunder, whose abrasive yet stoic nu-metal might recalls Korn and Linkin Park.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

VOID OF VISION
Chronicles II: Heaven
UNFD

On their latest EP, these Melbournites continue to push their sound in an intriguing direction. Merging hardcore and raging metalcore with ethereal vocals and hedonistic electronics, it's another blinder.

DANNII LEIVERS

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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Ibaraki: Matt Heafy meditates on the metallic arts

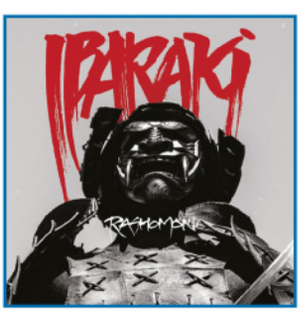
IBARAKI

Rashomon

NUCLEAR BLAST

Extreme grandeur from Matt Heafy's solo venture

IF EVER THERE was a passion project, Matt Heafy's expedition into the world of black(ened) metal is it. The Trivium frontman's solo venture has been rumoured for more than a decade and now arrives, with impeccable timing, just as its creator's main band are enjoying their greatest level of popularity and prominence yet. Drenched in the imagery and mythological themes of Heafy's ancient Japanese heritage, *Rashomon* is plainly much more than some self-indulgent side-project. The music – complex, crafted, tumultuous and tender – is both frequently surprising and more or less along the lines of what one might expect, particularly given Ihsahn's ongoing role as this project's spirit guide.



At its best, *Rashomon* is revelatory. Trivium have long exhibited a solid understanding of heavy metal's dynamic potential, and those sensibilities have enabled Heafy to let his imagination run riot here. After a disarmingly wistful, accordion-led overture, *Kagutsuchi* sets the tone with swathes of white-knuckle extremity, progged-out structural twists, flurries of traditional Japanese instrumentation and Heafy switching from scabrous screech to a sonorous baritone croon that stays just the right side of overwrought. Similarly, *Ibaraki-Dōji* verges on celebratory in its maxed-out over-the-topness, as Heafy channels his inner Emperor, but meddles with the Norwegians' formula with thinly disguised glee, veering artfully from all-out blackened fury to sombre, somnambulant waltz and back again.

Thereafter, *Rashomon* ebbs and flows with an acute sense of high drama, as the crazed ideas and epic flourishes continue unabated. It's all sufficiently immersive and elegantly conceived that cameos from Ihsahn (*Susanoo No Mikoto*), Nergal (*Akumu*) and, erm, Gerard Way (*Rōnin*) pass by without fuss, each one neatly assimilated into the bigger picture.

Too progressive for black metal purists and arguably too extreme for a good chunk of Trivium's audience, *Rashomon* is a brave, heartfelt and pointedly progressive move from a sincere student of the dark, metallic arts. Well worth the wait, as it turns out.

FOR FANS OF: Trivium, Emperor, Borknagar

DOM LAWSON

INTROTYL

Adfectus

EMANZIPATION PRODUCTIONS

Mexico's sisters of savagery kick death awake

An all-woman death metal wrecking crew from Mexico City, Introtyl favour a simple but lethally effective approach. Not a second of *Adfectus* is wasted with atmospheric dicking about or progressive detours: instead, from the horrified crunch of *Abyss* onwards, this is all about delivering memorable songs brutal enough to scare average folk shitless. Aided greatly by vocalist Kary Ramos's broken-glass bellow, which has a Corpsegrinder-like cadence and authority to it, groove-heavy and fat-free assaults like *Inner War* and *Flame* have circle-pit-carnage written all over them. Closer *Zombiefied* is an instant anthem for undead rivetheads everywhere. One of the most entertaining half-hours of brutality in recent memory.

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Crypta, Deicide

DOM LAWSON

JUNGLE ROT

A Call To Arms

UNIQUE LEADER

Wisconsin death metal veterans upgrade their redneck stomp

In death metal, there's good and bad dumb fun. While 7,856 faceless Suffocation clones belong to the second category, there's something undeniably charming about the kind of good ol' meat'n' potatoes warfare offered by Jungle Rot. Just like contemporaries Obituary, they've barely changed their strategy since their 1996 cult debut, *Skin The Living*. But after a rough patch a decade ago, their solid mix of early basic DM, thrash and hardcore has been since rejuvenated with proper soloing and Dan Swanö's bombastic mixing. Dave Matrise's barking may have more in common with Agnostic Front's Roger Miret than John Tardy, but those tales of war are all about the hooks, hooks and even more hooks.

FOR FANS OF: Obituary, Hatebreed, Pro-Pain

OLIVIER BADIN

KATHAROS

Of Lineages Long Forgotten

WILLOWTIP

Symphonic black metallers bring grit to their grandeur

Katharos's second outing offers another volley of symphonic black metal, although this time around the emphasis is more heavily weighted to the BM side of the equation. It's a welcome refinement. Not that 2016's *Exuvian Heraldry* didn't have some stridently gripping moments, but its reverential Dimmu Borgir-worship lacked any real innovation. Here the Swedes conjure a pointedly darker and more violent aura, with tracks like *Feigned Retreat* and *I Waged War* unrelenting in their blackened brutality. Fresh ideas arrive in the form of subtle prog arrangements and, when paired with a hefty dose of symphonic grandeur, tracks like *Most Dread Portent* transform into ripping hymns of darkness. This is a bold and welcome step forward.

FOR FANS OF: Dimmu Borgir, Cradle Of Filth, Emperor

JOE DALY

PRESS X2

KIMAERA
Imperivm
SELF-RELEASED

Lebanon's late metal lynchpin makes a triumphant last stand

Lebanese death metal troopers Kimaera celebrate the memory of founding frontman Jean-Pierre Haddad, a leader and 22-year veteran of a metal scene that's fought against all odds to exist, let alone flourish. Before his untimely passing, work was completed on fourth album *Imperivm*, a conceptual passion project for Haddad exploring Lebanon's history as part of the Roman Empire. Combining blackened DM bombast with Middle Eastern instrumentation, *De Amare Et Bellum* is an imperious opening salvo. *VVV* sounds cataclysmic enough to fell an empire, its staccato pummelling shaking all asunder as orchestral and choral pomp reaches crescendo. *Vi Divina* is swathed in mournful strings as thrash riffs vie with vehement blasting for supremacy. Released on the Ides Of March, *Imperivm* marks a triumphant last ride for a legend of Lebanese music.

FOR FANS OF: Kaoteon, Septicflesh, Rotting Christ

TOM O'BOYLE

JANI LIIMATAINEN
My Father's Son
FRONTIERS

Insomnium guitarist leaves his personality at the door

Jani Liimatainen is a guitar virtuoso with tenures in Insomnium, Sonata Arctica and Stratovarius under his belt. Plus, prestigious guest vocalists from Soilwork's Björn 'Speed' Strid to ex-Nightwish frontwoman Anette Olzon are strewn across the album. But no matter how stacked your CV is, it can't write melodies for you, as this cavalcade of gutless power metal demonstrates. Despite revisiting the soundscape of his Sonata days, Jani's seemingly forgotten how to pen the simplest of hooks. *Side By Side* is so innocuously peppy that it sounds ripped from a Center Parcs advert, while *The Music Box*'s unmitigated schmaltz belongs over the end credits of *Sex And The City*. Every singer deals in the same squeaky-clean cries, obliterating any hint of individuality. There's nothing noteworthy in this hour of uninterrupted filler.

FOR FANS OF: Sonata Arctica, Nightwish, The Night Flight Orchestra

MATT MILLS

MÅNEGARM
Ynglingaättens Öde
NAPALM

Sweden's blackened metallers hone their wide-ranging craft

There's a craft to Månegarm's sound. The interplay between melodic death metal and folk, the pockets of traditional instrumentation woven gracefully into their acerbic sounds and their judicious use of black metal have consistently permeated their career. But while peers such as Moonsorrow and Thyrfing have enjoyed the successes of the folk frenzy, Månegarm have slipped through the cracks. Their 10th studio drop might be the one that shifts them closer to the limelight. The lavish opener *Freyrs Blod* mainlines their compulsion to craft layers of atmosphere while the chant-driven *Stridsgalten*, featuring Korpiklaani frontman Jonne Järvelä, feels like Månegarm in rabble-rousing mode. *Auns Söner* channels Behemoth, but it's *Vitta Véttr*'s sojourn into BM that really bites, showing how comfortable, and convincing, Månegarm are in multiple guises.

FOR FANS OF: Heidevolk, Amon Amarth, Thyrfing

HOLLY WRIGHT

MNRVA
Hollow
BLACK DOOMBA

Stoner/doom standards from the high hills of South Carolina

The recipe that continues to deliver stoner/doom metal to expectant ears hasn't changed much since four Brummies gathered to bequeath Black Sabbath. These days the amps may be louder, the distortion fuzzier, the drums beaten more ferociously, the vocals gruffer and more shouty, but the same bluesy progressions, throbbing backbeats and tritone abuse still form the basis for bands like MNRVA to continue to play with. In this case, the South Carolinian trio strip away frills, keeping the riffing as familiar as a ratty security blanket backed by simplistic four-on-the-floor rhythms proven effective throughout rock history. There may be a discouraging lack of excitement overall, but flashes of redemption do exist in the form of the toe-tapping reliability of *Third Eye* and the epic crawl of *Befall*.

FOR FANS OF: Acid King, Goatsnake, Bongzilla

CONNIE GORDON

Malevolence make their way to metalcore's next level

MALEVOLENCE
Malicious Intent
NUCLEAR BLAST

Bullish Brits throw down the metalcore gauntlet

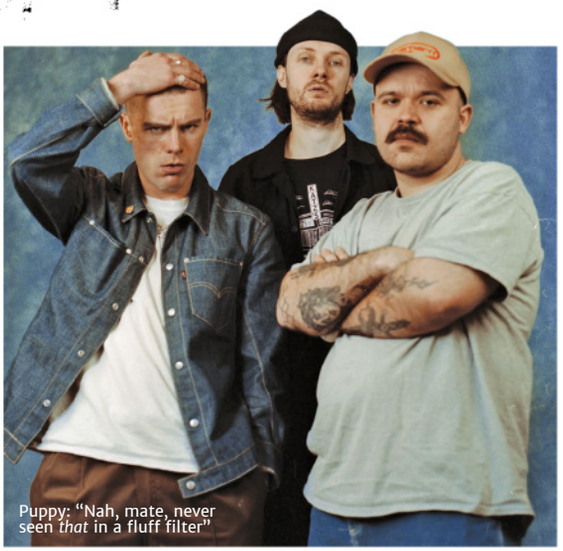
WHEN *REIGN OF Suffering* tore out of Sheffield in a blur of testosterone in 2013, onlookers were rightfully gushing about the potency and potential of Malevolence. 2017's *Self Supremacy* was a solid follow-up, but the promise of that thunderous debut didn't manifest in the band reaching beyond the Britain's metal scene's mid-level. All of which puts a hefty weight on the steel-clad deltoids of *Malicious Intent* to batter the glass ceiling into submission.

The title track detonates with the controlled aggression that Hatebreed fans have been begging for for a decade, with Alex Taylor's roars of defiance sounding colossal atop the furious melee. Whenever Malevolence bring the heavy on the likes of *Karma* and *Life Sentence*, there are few that can live with them, featuring the kind of breakdowns that necessitate putting opponents through tables. But as they've shown time and again, there's so much more to the band than wanton thuggery. Konan Hall and Josh Baines add all manner of spice to their riffs and leads, with the swagger of *On Broken Glass* and *Above All Else*'s techy widdling standing atop the podium. And of course, the whiskey-drenched Southern drawl of Hall's second vocals still sound so perversely cool next to the licks of *Do Or Die*.

Backed by a crisp, muscular mix, each track leaves bruises and righteous grins in its wake. The most risky but exciting moments come with the soaring chorus of *Salvation* – which includes help from ubiquitous Matthew K Heafy – and the stadium-sized ballad *Higher Place*. Both comfortably as catchy as any radio-bothering anthem from the likes of Five Finger Death Punch, they are vanguards of an album that proudly boasts its intention of planting a banner of victory on hitherto unexplored ground. Crucially, *Malicious Intent*'s achievement matches its ambition.

FOR FANS OF: Hatebreed, Trivium, Crowbar

ADAM REES


Puppy: "Nah, mate, never seen *that* in a fluff filter"

PUPPY
Pure Evil
RUDE

London's alt-metal three-piece rise to new heights

DESPITE THE SHIT hitting the fan on planet Earth for the past few years, it hasn't stopped Puppy doing their bit in making the world a better place. Becoming underground heroes over the past seven years with their off-centre grunge/metal hybrid, fans have been on tenterhooks for a follow-up to 2019's belter factory, *The Goat*. Though the band delivered on their third EP, *iii*, that same year, which displayed their doomier side, it seemed that they were ready to take on a sound that fans could really sink their teeth into. And goddamn, have they delivered here.

In its riffalicious glory, the aptly titled *Pure Evil* is what every sophomore album should strive to achieve. *The Goat* showcased that the three-piece could undoubtedly write massively catchy tunes by the barrel-load, but this record utilises their songwriting abilities to the next level, adding a gravitas that sucks you in from the off.

Make no mistake, there are plenty of earworms the album delivers on, like *The Kiss* or *Angel*, but it's tracks like headbanger *Wasted Little Heart* or the Deftones-meets-Ghost concoction *Spellbound* that take you by complete surprise. Just when you think you know what Puppy are capable of, they chuck a U-turn and bash out an onslaught of pure heavy metal, weaving through hooky melancholic alt-rock that is totally unexpected yet doesn't feel contrived.

Pure Evil feels like a natural progression that's led to Puppy really flexing their musical muscles, especially for vocalist/guitarist Jock Norton, whose range on a six-string just baffles the brain – from serenading tenderness to gut-busting shred. Though jaw-dropping, it wouldn't have the same effect on this album without Billy Howard Price's thunderous drumming and Will Michael's driving basslines. Puppy's most sophisticated release to date, and an absolute must-listen.

FOR FANS OF: Green Lung, Weezer, Ghost

HYWEL DAVIES

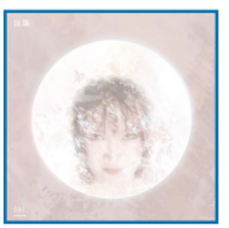
NATJAGER
At Kende Bølge Fra Hav
LAST MILE

Danish alt-metallers commune with the autotone

This Danish alt-metal mob are looking to up the ante with their second album. There's some seriously good stuff among the 11 tracks here, from the expansive *Alt Under Himlen* to the chunky guitars in *Overdosis*. However, *At Kende...* sinks or swims entirely on the listener's attitude towards autotune, because Natjager haven't so much embraced it as moved into its residence; it plays such a major role in their sound, and they've been described as 'Cher metal' before now. If you can stomach it, there's a lot to enjoy. If not, this will grate on you rather quickly.

FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, Architects, I Prevail

ELLIOT LEAVER



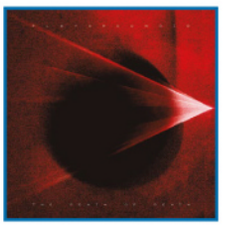
OU
One
INSIDEOUT

Mind-bending post-everything prog metal from China

OU are the first Chinese band to sign to a major overseas label. They're also, without question, the first band to sound like anything like this. Part progressive metal blitzkrieg, part dream-pop reverie, part post-rock exploration, *One* goes to multiple mind-bending places within each song. The opening *Travel* is spellbinding, with its lurching post-djent riffs, pitiless blastbeats and sublime, spiralling pop melodies. Both the explosive and theatrical *Prejudice* and the restless, sprawling *Dark* are modern prog metal made deliciously weird. *Ghost* is a magic carpet ride through a gleaming white tunnel of ambience, while *Euphoria* feels more like an unfathomable, riveting sonic collage than anything more recognisably song-like. This is a certified, life-affirming mind-blower.

FOR FANS OF: Animals As Leaders, Rolo Tomassi, My Bloody Valentine

DOM LAWSON



PLAYGROUNDED
The Death Of Death
PELAGIC

Dutch post-metallers perfect the patient art of word-building

Playgrounded embody the term 'slow burn'. All three of their albums are separated by a five-year gap, and *The Death Of Death* similarly rewards the patient, marrying post-rock and prog metal in its creeping, long-running compositions. The title track fills nearly eight minutes with crawling basslines and extended vocal howls, proving more immersive and hypnotic than explosive. *The Swan* is more dynamic, commencing with fat, echoing guitars, and finale *Our Fire* answers its build-up with a riff tuned hellishly low, as well as beautifully multilayered singing. For those who like their metal immediate, look elsewhere. However, if you want to lose yourself in a musical landscape, *The Death Of Death* is an essential experience.

FOR FANS OF: Mercury Circle, Year Of No Light, The Ocean

MATT MILLS

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

DUSK
The Relic
SELF-RELEASED

This blackened Costa Rican ruckus cloaks itself in a shroud of scattershot cosmic turbulence, led by a Big Daddy Mars wannabe convening breakcore rallies in the belly of an interstellar battlecruiser.

SPENCER GRADY

HIDDENT
Where Light Ceases To Exist
SELF-RELEASED

Chile's underground continues to spew out infernal gems. HiddenT espouse a militant, 90s BM ethos and have the seething, monolithic epics to back it up. Pure darkness, served with a scowl.

DOM LAWSON

R.A.I.D.
Defiance
ROTTWEILER

On this Indian crossover thrash quartet's third album, hardcore grunts and barrelling, punkish chords prove ideal for acolytes of Suicidal Tendencies and Anthrax. There's little new, but it scratches the itch.

MATT MILLS

PRESS

PYRESHIP
Light Is A Barrier
SELF-RELEASE

Post-rock reveries and monument missives from the Lone Star State

Recorded live off the floor, Texans Pyreship have been sitting on *Light Is A Barrier* since early 2020. Now that the pandemic's worst is weaning, the expanded quintet – welcome, vocalist Jenny Jordan! – is seeing fit to introduce a different sort of darkness with their second album. With roots in post-metal's dynamics as well as shoegazing climbs and crescendos, Pyreship work to individuate themselves with melodic washes rooted in grunge and 90s indie rock. Opener *Broken Spire* throws in furious layers of vocal call and response, whereas *Anathema* could have been a hitchhiker along Cult Of Luna's highway. It may be easy to play 'spot the influence' here, but it's easier to be whisked away by this album's crushing and mellifluous enormity.

FOR FANS OF: Isis, The Ocean, Red Sparrowes

CONNIE GORDON

SACRED SON
The Foul Deth Of Engelond
SELF-RELEASED

Black metal mischief-makers make a call for revolution

Sacred Son head honcho Dane Cross has earned himself a reputation over the last few years for being adept at putting noses out of joint. The project's self-titled debut infamously took a machete to black metal fandom, splitting it in two due to its cheerful, what-I did-on-my-holidays sleeve, and now their fourth album looks set to ruffle some feathers once more. Described by the talented riffsmith as an ode to left-wing political violence, their new opus uses accounts of the 1381 Peasant's Revolt as fuel for their caustic salvos of sound and fury. Dispensing with the ambient leanings of their more recent material, this one is loaded with growls, howls, corrosive riffs and unbridled rage. The clean vocals-sprinkled *Vengeance I & II* is a standout, as is the epic, morose and monstrous title track.

FOR FANS OF: The Infernal Sea, Winterfylleth, Wolves In The Throne Room

EDWIN McFEE

SADISTIC RITUAL
The Enigma, Boundless
PROSTHETIC

Altanta's blackened thrashers kick against the kaleidoscopes

Let it be known that there's more to labelling than throwing spiffy sounding nomenclature around. This Atlanta band is being billed as "psychedelic thrash," though after a couple of whirls through their second full-length it's obvious that the kaleidoscope is limited to the patterned burst of colour on the cover, a few flashes of spirited guitar and the relaxed, yet still powerful, vibe of instrumental track, *The Blood Of Memory*. In actuality, *The Enigma, Boundless* nabs more inspiration from those dark legions like Watain and Black Anvil – bands that have built a collective identity around the music. That's not to say the mis-billing detracts from a very good record, as it's one with a spirit that salutes Germany's thrashing stalwarts (the title track) and uses prodigious skill and flashy dexterity (*And You...*) to ram everything into the melodic heart of modern-wave black metal.

FOR FANS OF: Watain, Kreator, Revocation

CONNIE GORDON

SAVIOUR
Shine & Fade
GREYSCALE

Mellifluous, monstrous metalcore from the Australian south west

Saviour's sound has been an evolving feast ever since the band brought folk/indie singer Shontay Snow into the fold on their second album, 2013's *First Light To My Death Bed*. Since then, her serene vocals have increasingly become a focal point within the Perth sextet's slickly produced metalcore, while the band have continued to add swathes of ethereal melody with every release. That lean towards the melodic has continued with *Shine & Fade*, which sees Saviour add the clean vocals of bassist Chris Pearce into the mix, facing off as a three-pronged attack against Shontay's serene interjections and crushing barks from co-vocalist Bryant Best. That yin and yang is at the core of the glittering sound, with *Reshape Me* and *Black Rosary* shifting between lofty guitar leads, progressive touches, dreamy choruses and juddering breakdowns. Chalk up another win for Aussie metalcore.

FOR FANS OF: Make Them Suffer, Earth Caller, Void Of Vision

DANNII LEIVERS

Jo Quail maps out an enthralling new vision

JO QUAIL
The Cartographer
BY NORSE

Metal's favourite bow-holder conjures a classic

WHEN THE CELLO was created in the 16th century, it seems unlikely that anyone anticipated Jo Quail. Increasingly one of the most respected and revered musicians in underground and experimental music, she has almost single-handedly expanded heavy music's vocabulary, adding textural depth to all manner of diverse projects and, more importantly, producing fascinating and ambitious works of her own. In Quail's hands, the cello is much more than simply one instrument in the orchestra; whole worlds of sonic splendour and terror emerge from her nimble fingers and vivid imagination. But even by her own ambitious standards, *The Cartographer* is a monumental work.

Forty-eight minutes long, and divided into five movements, *The Cartographer* was commissioned for exclusive performance at Roadburn Festival. Non-attendees can only shudder at how powerful this was in the flesh, because Quail has conjured something truly extraordinary here. It begins with the clash of a gong, a languid drone and a poetic voiceover, leading to a prolonged passage of disembodied melodies floating in lysergic mist. A stately surge of orchestral pomp ushers in *Movement 2*, wherein a restless pulse underscores huge bursts of infernal horns and a glacial descent into interwoven discord. *Movement 3* is simply astonishing; from its opening moments of tense, sinister ambient drift to its grotesque, quasi-industrial, operatic climax that evokes everything from Laibach to Art Zoyd, it is as heavy and heart-stopping as any metal record. Wickedly hypnotic, *Movement 4*'s glistening web of strings and brass is underpinned by an off-kilter, skittering rhythm that threatens never to end, while *Movement 5*'s ensemble squall creeps towards an ecstatic final crescendo, mournful but defiant. Should you find yourself leaping from your chair to applaud at the end, be reassured that attendees at Roadburn will have already lost their minds too.

FOR FANS OF: Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Anna von Hausswolff, Art Zoyd

DOM LAWSON

NICK HODGSON/PRESS

Septicflesh look for fresh inspiration

SEPTICFLESH

Modern Primitive

NUCLEAR BLAST

Greece's symphonic death metal conductors keep the wheels spinning

THE SEPTICFLESH STORY is well established by now. They formed in 1990, darted through every death metal subgenre under the sun to see what would stick, then split in 2003, citing commitments to their higher education. They returned five years later with *Communion* – an orchestral black/death fireball so destructive, heavy and grandiose that it could have soundtracked the apocalypse itself. What's come since is a decade and a half in the same mode, with strings and choirs swelling over chugging riffs and Seth Siro Anton's roars.

Modern Primitive is more of the same. As a result, your enjoyment of it rests solely on whether you can handle Septicflesh treading identical turf for the fifth time in a row. Those of you who can will get another morose, bombastic metal symphony. The album again exhibits the band's longest-running irony; for all the 80-piece orchestras they've bombarded metalheads with, their most triumphant instrument has always been Sotiris Vayenas' clean singing. It's his pipes that are behind *Modern Primitive*'s biggest earworm, belting out an instantly replayable *'Why do we fall?'* during the title track, and they hammer home the hook of *Hierophant*.

The rest of the band may not be evolving, but they're by no means half-assing it. *Neuromancer* is an instant adrenaline fix; it explodes from an acoustic flamenco into the purest of headbangable groove metal. The guitar leads of *A Desert Throne* pluck straight from the Amorphis school of melodeath, integrating Middle Eastern harmonies that extend to the cellos. By the time *A Dreadful Muse* closes in a slower death/doom crawl, the old dog hasn't learned any new tricks. That said, the usual fare is still deftly executed enough that it won't bore the symphonic metal junkies returning for another fix.

FOR FANS OF: Dimmu Borgir, Ex Deo, Fleshgod Apocalypse

MATT MILLS

SILVERSTEIN

Misery Made Me

UNFD

Post-hardcore mainstays keep flexing their emotional muscles

Even 22 years on, these Canadians are unafraid to flex their sound to suit their mood and all to an admirably cohesive end. *Our Song*, a loud, bouncy stress-reliever, is a powerful opener and *Die Alone*, featuring Comeback Kid's Andrew Neufeld, packs a heavier punch with its heady fretwork and brilliant dual vocals. *Ultraviolet* and *It's Over* are radio-friendly, but the captivating tracks like *Bankrupt* and strangely batty *The Altar/Mary* are examples of the more quirky but equally effective growers to be found here. Meanwhile, *Cold Blood* featuring Trevor Daniel and *Misery* featuring nothing, nowhere., provide gentle breaks in the storm. Simultaneously honest, helpless, and hopeful with strong songwriting, *Misery Made Me* tugs tighter with each listen.

FOR FANS OF: Beartooth, Sum 41, Underoath

NIK YOUNG

SOMALI YACHT CLUB

The Space

SEASON OF MIST

Ukrainian post-rockers hit a new, enthralling crescendo

After a decade of service and two albums of shimmeringly psychedelic post-rock, this Ukrainian trio have really hit form with their third release. *The Space* is accurately named, as this is a record of vast expanse and swirling, transcendent beauty. The usual reference points of this genre, such as Tool or Mogwai, are fairly clear here. But it's the alt-rock leaning of a song like the utterly fantastic *Pulsar* that touches on the slinky glam of Placebo at points, or the stark drumming and delicate guitar opening of *Echo Of Direction* – which isn't a million miles away from Joy Division – that set SYC apart from the crescendo-core crowd.

FOR FANS OF: King Buffalo, Open Hand, Maybeshewill

STEPHEN HILL

STÖNER

Totally...

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Fuzzy hits from esteemed masters of the bong

With three decades of dedication to desert rock under their intermittently shared belt, former Kyuss men Nick Oliveri and Brant Bjork have little to prove at this point. With tongues planted gently in cheeks, Stöner seems to exist to enable the duo – alongside drummer Ryan Güt, from Brant's solo band – to gleefully embrace every last fuzzed-out cliché and therefore give the red-eyed public exactly what they want. As a result, *Totally...* is an amiable but cocksure affair, full of rambling, hazy jams and moments of yobbish, souped-up rock'n'roll. In truth, only the sun-ravaged, slow motion blues of *Space Dude & The Burn* comes close to these veterans' finest work, but there are worse ways to get royally baked.

FOR FANS OF: Kyuss, Fu Manchu, Kamchatka

DOM LAWSON

STELLA MOUZI/PRESS

SYBERIA
Statement On Death
METAL BLADE/BLACKLIGHT MEDIA

Sumptuous post-rock expanses from the Catalonian coast

As the title suggests, there's darkness in Syberia's take on post-metal, but it is punctuated by several shafts of light that permeate throughout. The furious tremolo picking on *Ain't.Care.About.Bullets.* creates a jubilant bath of sound that recalls Mono at their most upbeat with waves of heavily distorted guitar. Even when things do turn melancholic, as on *Breathe*, there's a sense of bittersweet euphoria waiting to burst forth. The Barcelonians haven't made extravagant changes to their sound but *Statement On Death* is the first time the band have presented their ideas as five long tracks – with the shortest over seven minutes long. This can be a risk but Syberia utilise enough twists and turns to keep your interest throughout. They may not bring anything new to the table, but they emulate their heroes with precision and aplomb.

FOR FANS OF: Russian Circles, Toundra, Caspian

REMFRY DEDMAN

TARLD
Trapped
BLOOD BLAST

Gallic post-hardcore quartet go fourth and conquer

Aka The Amsterdam Red Light District, this Lyon-based quartet dole out aggression, passion and catchiness in equal measures. There's heart and soul at work in TARLD's world, and their fourth album brings new levels of confidence and solid songwriting. With post-hardcore melodies married to gritty blasts of metalcore, opener *Threatened Generation* is urgent in its skittish impatience and stabbing riffs, while *Born To Be Great* and *Fair Weather Friends* are infused with memorable, scream-along choruses. Elio Sxone is front and centre; he's emotive when singing cleanly, and uncompromising when segueing effortlessly to rawer howls, reminiscent of Stray From The Path's Drew York, who makes a furious cameo on searing tubthumper *Good Intentions*. A well-crafted release sure to delight fans of emotionally intelligent post-hardcore.

FOR FANS OF: Stray From The Path, Refused, Fever 333

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

TENEBRA
Moongazer
NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Earthy Italian retro/stoner rockers get a spring in their step

Italian stoner rockers Tenebra are looking to break out properly with their second album – a love letter to 70s' fuzzy riffs and bluesy vocals. Structurally and sonically, this does exactly what it sets out to do: nine slabs of raucous proto-metal that takes everything that made the early strains of Zeppelin and Deep Purple so appealing and brings them into the present day. However, there are nuances smattered across the album that take it beyond the merely adequate: not least heavy, space-rock keyboards on the closing track *Moon Maiden* (also featuring Screaming Trees guitarist Gary Lee Conner) and the out-of-nowhere sax solo that closes *Space Child*. As the days begin to get longer and warmer, this makes for an excellent summer soundtrack.

FOR FANS OF: Blues Pills, Lucifer, Coven

ELLIOT LEAVER

TERROR
Pain Into Power
END HITS

LA's hardcore kings return to their rampaging roots

Reunited with Todd Jones, Terror's founding guitarist who left in 2004 to start Nails, it's little surprise that they've taken a heavier, faster and more abrasive turn. Their eighth studio album blends the urgency of Lowest Of The Low with modern maturity, and the trusty riffs, breakdowns and basslines are all distilled into an intense, 20-minute adrenaline shot. Jones handles production, Matt Hyde (Keepers Of The Faith) handles engineering and mixing, and guest vocalists include Cannibal Corpse's George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher on *Can't Help But Hate*, Year Of The Knife's Madison Watkins and Initiate's Crystal Pak on *Unashamed*, and Jones himself on *The Hardest Truth*. *Boundless Contempt* is particularly vocally aggressive, and *One Thousand Lies* is the album's classic stomping, fist-clenching pit-opener. Ever authentic, Terror bring the bleak rugged toughness and defiant resilience needed right now.

FOR FANS OF: Lionheart, First Blood, Comeback Kid

NIK YOUNG

Upon A Burning Body return to take the heat

UPON A BURNING BODY
Fury
SEEK & STRIKE

Contentious metalcore crew take no prisoners on album six

EIGHT YEARS ON, many in the rock and metal world still know Upon A Burning Body for the fake kidnapping stunt they pulled to promote third album *The World Is My Enemy Now* – a move that was soundly derided from all corners yet garnered no apology from the band at all, either at the time or in the years since. Despite this – and their mawkish cover of DJ Snake and Lil Jon's *Turn Down For What* that surfaced at the same time – they've otherwise continued in good form, with previous album *Southern Hostility* garnering strong reviews. Sixth album *Fury* intends to keep that upwards trajectory going for the Texan bruisers. None of its 11 tracks exceed three and a half minutes in length, and the result is arguably the metalcore outfit's angriest record to date.

The intentions are set out clear as day; the opening double salvo of *A New Responsibility* and *Snake Eyes* feature groove-laden riffs and pummelling drums – a well-versed formula yet one that never sounds stale or outdated. The tempo is relentless; even interlude track *Sweet Serenity* has a bite to it, and when tracks such as *Code Of Honor* and *Thunderheart* get going, it's virtually impossible to sit still.

Having been a songwriter for the previous album, Thomas Alvarez now takes a permanent place in the band alongside his brother Ruben. His contributions to bass and backing vocals add a new edge, no doubt buoyed by him getting a chance to prove additional musical chops that weren't seen last time around. At just under 32 minutes, *Fury* doesn't outstay its welcome either, delivering with maximum impact and leaving no prisoners. Even if you've not been a fan of the band in the past, this is a blistering record that deserves your attention.

FOR FANS OF: Lamb Of God, Pantera, Whitechapel

ELLIOT LEAVER

Watain: strap in for the ride

WATAIN
The Agony & Ecstasy Of Watain
NUCLEAR BLAST

Uppsala's black metal torchbearers host an incendiary uprising

WATAIN'S UNWAVERING COMMITMENT to sonic extremity, combined with their transcendent live show, has helped to establish them as the preeminent force in today's black metal scene, though not without controversy. In 2018, touring member Set Teitan stepped away from the band when photos emerged of him performing a Nazi salute. It was another black eye for a subgenre seeking to distance itself from such problematic behaviours.

On their latest, Watain resume their impious evolution, though the growth is subtle. *Ecstasies In Night Infinite* announces the album's murderous intent with a firestorm of blastbeats and buzzsaw riffs, building to a dizzying, Slayer-esque solo. *The Howling* and *Before The Cataclysm* tap into wavelengths of such unrelenting malice that they seem to channel the very fires of Hell, serenaded by Erik Danielsson's raw, blistering vocals. The influence of Dissection continues to ride on Watain's shoulders like a hateful, coal-eyed raven, particularly on tracks like *Black Cunt*. *Leper's Grace* throws sand in the face of any black metal purist with a rumbling low-end that foists its meaty bassline front and centre.

Though happy to swing sledgehammers at the skull all day long, Watain pull back the BPM on *Serimosa*, with its stabbing melody and grinding, mid-tempo malevolence. It's a great example of how Watain are inspired by, rather than imitators of, the old-school Norwegian style. Then there's *We Remain*, a luminous incantation that opens with the ethereal vocals of Molassess' Farida Lemouchi, as the track's winding, baleful melody builds to a stirring crescendo. Though you'd never use the word 'accessible' with Watain, *The Agony & Ecstasy Of...* is their catchiest outing yet, and jaws will surely drop at the level of both savagery and precision on display. As Watain continue to push, pull and expand their scene into captivating new realms, one is left with two options: get in or be dragged.

FOR FANS OF: Dissection, Tribulation, Gaerea

JOE DALY

THORIUM
Danmark
EMANZIPATION PRODUCTIONS

Danish death metal disciples stick to the script

Twenty-five years since they set out to fuse Floridian and Swedish death metal, Thorium have seldom managed to match the genre-defining heights of either scene. It's not for lack of passion, however, opener *War Is Coming* striking just the right balance between hard-bitten brutality and bombast. The biggest issue is with a lack of ambition. The riffs, snarls and beats of *Danmark* are often thoroughly enjoyable, but are practically nailed to a predictable route, leaving little room for individuality or innovation. Highlights *A Crown To Obscurity*, *My Decay* and *Nine Lives* show promise, but so long as Thorium continue to polish someone else's altar, you'll be unlikely to swap out your Entombed, Bloodbath or Morbid Angel records.

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Incantation, Bloodbath

RICH HOBSON

THREE DAYS GRACE
Explosions
MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Major-league post-grungers further their bland designs

By now, everyone knows what to expect from Three Days Grace. Since 2003, the Canadians have chalked up millions of streams and sales by churning out grunge-indebted hard rock that's workmanlike at best. Seventh album *Explosions* isn't completely devoid of charm; opener *So Called Life* is undeniably catchy, and the heaviest the Canadians have sounded in years, with gravelly vocals from singer Matt Walst tapping into the gritted-teeth frustration we've all felt at some point over the last two years. But elsewhere the material is flat, with *Neurotic* and *Someone To Talk To* struggling to conjure up genuine emotion. Almost two decades in, there's still a hole where 3DG's heart needs to be.

FOR FANS OF: Seether, Papa Roach, Breaking Benjamin

DANNII LEIVERS

THROWE
Forfald
DEATHBIRD

Blackened Danish debutants go for the tested smash'n'grab approach

At seven tracks and just 28 minutes, this Danish hardcore quintet are taking no prisoners with their debut full-length. The hyperactive drumming on *Aerosol Jesus* is enough to whip up a frenzied circle-pit, while *Hammer & Nails* rides in on a *Show No Mercy*-era Slayer riff before conjuring a sense of blackened grandeur that would befit King Diamond. The production is kept purposefully raw and ragged, which suits the straight-down-the-line material; this is no place for nuance or subtlety. Throwe admit themselves that they're not here "to revolutionise" but instead "to smash it up in the most noticeable way", and *Forfald* is a perfectly suitable if straightforward soundtrack to such wanton destruction.

FOR FANS OF: Kvelertak, Entombed, Slayer

REMFRY DEDMAN

EVELINA SZCZESIK/EVER VISION ART/PRESS

TÓMARÚM
Ash In Realms Of Stone Icons
PROSTHETIC

Black and tech-death missives from the churning pit of despair

An impenetrably complex amalgam of relentless tech-death and progressive black metal, Tómarúm's debut album doesn't disappoint; Kyle Walburn and Brandon Iacovella are a symbiotic songwriting duo who draw you inexorably into their inner world of profound self-loathing. *Condemned To A Life Of Grief* sets out the record's stall, its elongated instrumental eventually erupting in guttural anguish as the duo trade exultant solos to alleviate the despair. Blasts are intermittent intrusions allowing synths to soar and the guest bass of Arran McSporran of tech-death mind-flayers Virvum to ripple mellifluously to the fore. As the record builds to its epic climax, the introduction of clear vocal baritone brings an emotive profundity, the band still capable of surprising you an hour in.

FOR FANS OF: Vale Of Pnath, Shining (Swe), Woods Of Ypres

TOM O'BOYLE

UFOMAMMUT
Fenice
NEUROT/SUPERNATURAL CAT

Italian psych-rock voyagers take a more direct approach

The ninth album from these crazed psychonauts takes the Italian word for 'phoenix' as its title, and while it mightn't see them emerging as something wholly new, it's certainly fitting, given how *alive* the band are sounding. Maybe it's fresh blood in the form of new drummer Levre giving things an added jolt, but Ufomammut are practically haemorrhaging energy and gusto, with *Fenice* a swirling blur of magma-flow riffs, lysergic weirdness and wide-eyed experimentation. The sludgy crunches and bleary groans serve as a backdrop against which galaxies form, expand and implode, but while previous releases might have delivered these ideas across light years, the rewards now feel scintillatingly instantaneous. Final track *Empyros* serves as a perfect case in point; rather than a customarily epic stoner rock closer it's instead three joyous minutes of knuckleheaded abandon.

FOR FANS OF: Hawkwind, Teeth Of The Sea, Kyuss

ALEX DELLER

VULCANO
Stone Orange
EMANZIPATION PRODUCTIONS

True metal madness from São Paulo pioneers

Best known for their insanely chaotic and vicious 1986 debut *Bloody Vengeance*, Vulcano have been hacking away at the Brazilian metal coalface for over 40 years. Thankfully, they remain obdurately resistant to change, and while *Stone Orange* clearly sounds bigger and better than anything they've done before, the veteran quintet's feral and militantly old-school spirit is writ large across every last moment. Proudly rooted in extreme metal's formative years, but with a big chunk of Priest-tinged traditionalism thrown in, *Putrid Angels Ritual* and the endearingly titled *A Night In A Metal Gig* resound with an irresistible, knucklehead intensity. A wall-to-wall riot of gruff, snotty anthems, *Stone Orange* peaks with the celebratory thump of *Rebels From 80s* and the wild thrash hoedown of Cadaverise's *Vulcano Will Live Forever*: not so much a manifesto as a simple statement of fact.

FOR FANS OF: Sarcófago, Midnight, Sodom

DOM LAWSON

WO FAT
The Singularity
RIPPLE MUSIC

Dallas's cult doom-psych floor-shakers go for broke

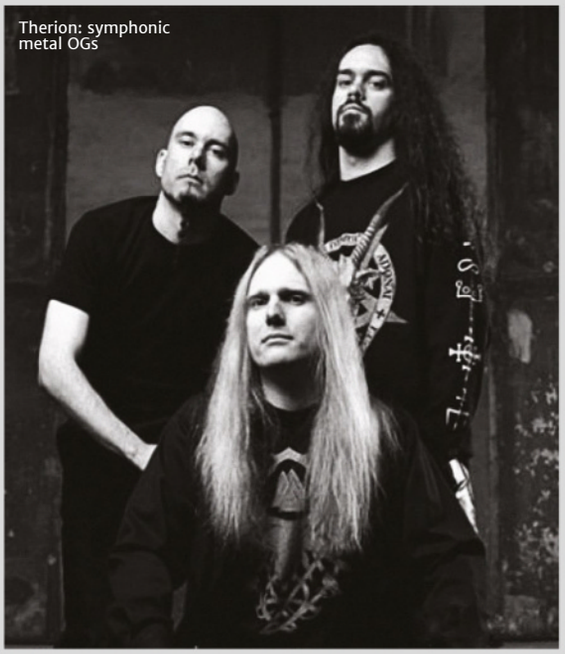
Despite critical acclaim and plum tour packages, Wo Fat have always been one rung shy of the next level, surviving as a cult proposition for nigh on two decades. Hopefully, album number seven will serve as the tipping point as it deserves all the attention metal nation – not just the stoner/doom faction – can afford its loping 60s biker jams, smoky improv jazz overindulgence, tightly wound knuckle-punches and boogie-woogie flash flooding. Full of apocalyptic dystopia and hip-shaking sensuality, *The Singularity*'s biggest strength is having songs exceed the 10-minute mark. The sprawling psychedelia of *Orphans Of The Singe* and the bugged-out stomp of *The Witching Chamber* belie their length with downshift riffing, infectious hooks and wailin' leads in the creation of a rocking gumbo masterstroke.

FOR FANS OF: Crowbar, The Atomic Bitchwax, Clutch

CONNIE GORDON

RESURRECTIONS

Unearthing the latest metal reissues


Therion: symphonic metal OGs

BRITISH THRASH NEVER attained the same level of excitement as its American, Brazilian or even German counterparts, but reissues of **XENTRIX**'s *Kin* **[7]** and *For Whose Advantage?* (Cherry Red) **[8]** shows the scene is long overdue a rediscovery. Remastered and souped up to appeal to modern revivalist sensibilities, Xentrix hold their own with seriously fun, energetic grooves. Similarly geographically challenged, Virginia's **TWISTED TOWER DIRE** were on entirely the wrong continent to be championing traditional heavy metal via the medium of power metal cheese in the early 00s. *Crest Of The Martyrs Demos* **[5]** strips their sound to the bare essentials and is perfect for fans of Sanhedrin or Wolftooth who want that rootsy trad-metal sound, but is hardly going to convert the apathetic and certainly won't worry the likes of Powerwolf or Sabaton.

On the more extreme scale of things, we have early 90s Floridian death/thrashers **SOLSTICE**. Granted, it's not one of their vintage records, but 2009's *To Dust* **[7]** still sizzles with *that* Floridian crossover of death/thrash that made the scene so utterly magnificent in the first place. With a title like *Only Tools And Corpses* **[7]**, **GOREROTTED** were never playing at being intellectual powerhouses – instead they offer death/grind on a gloriously dumb, fun platter.

The real gold star goes to **THERION**, however, the reissue of the three-album run of 1992's *Beyond Sanctorum* **[7]**, 1993's *Symphony Masses: Ho Drakon Ho Megas* **[9]** and 1995's *Lepaca Kliffoth* (Hammerheart) **[8]** is an exercise in evolutionary leaps that would make Darwin weak in the knees. *Symphony Masses* remains the crown jewel; the band's stylistic journey can range from down-and-nasty death metal right into pendulous epic doom without batting an eye. Even so, *Lepaca...* offers a fascinating insight into the developing world of symphonic metal, incorporating elements that would two years later become staples of the genre with the advent of Nightwish and Within Temptation. They weren't named for one of extreme metal's OG innovators for nothing, that's for sure.

RICH HOBSON

PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

JUDAS PRIEST
QUEENSRŸCHE

SHRINE AUDITORIUM, LOS ANGELES

The metal gods rule supreme on the West Coast

WHEN JUDAS PRIEST announced their 50 Heavy Metal Years Tour in February 2020, it seemed like a can't-miss – a celebratory victory lap around the globe to commemorate the golden anniversary of one of the genre's all-time greats. Unfortunately, the world had other ideas, and the tour was subsequently postponed until Year 51. It finally kicked off last August with a triumphant headlining performance at Bloodstock, after which the band hopped across the pond for what was scheduled to be a 37-show trek across North America.

Near the end of show 13, however, guitarist Richie Faulkner suffered a ruptured aorta that led to 10 hours of open-heart surgery, as well as another tour postponement. Five months later, the tour resumed with special guests **QUEENSRŸCHE** – a bill that works just as well in 2022 as it would have in 1992. During their effective hour-long opening set at the longtime home of the Oscars and Grammys, the band perform nothing released in the last three decades and deliver a fierce reminder that they can successfully complement metallic groups just as well as progressive-minded ones. Todd La Torre – who, amazingly, has already been in the band for 10 years – impresses with his own screams for vengeance, as he deftly demonstrates in *Queen Of The Reich*, *Warning* and *Walk In The Shadows*. It's a ballsy move to shun their biggest hits tonight, but when you're metallic royalty, you don't have to play by the rules. Long live the Queen, indeed.

While Richie was recovering from surgery, his bandmates curiously announced plans to continue the 50 Years tour as a quartet without Andy Sneap, the producer of 2018's acclaimed *Firepower*, who was drafted into action after founding guitarist Glenn Tipton revealed that he'd been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. After fans openly rebelled against the idea of Priest sans dual guitars, the band admirably reversed their decision after five days.

Queensrÿche: golden oldies

THE SET

One Shot At Glory
Lightning Strike
You've Got Another Thing Comin'
Freewheel Burning
Turbo Lover
Hell Patrol
The Sentinel
A Touch Of Evil
Rocka Rolla
Victim Of Changes
Desert Plains
Blood Red Skies
Diamonds & Rust
Painkiller

ENCORE

Electric Eye
Hell Bent For Leather
Metal Gods
Breaking The Law
Living After Midnight

As Judas Priest deliver a riveting 110-minute, 19-song masterclass in metal prowess, it's impossible to envision it being conducted by a single guitarist, even one as obviously gifted as Richie. Andy not only looks the part and plays it like a pro, but his onstage swagger is such a natural fit that you'd be forgiven for thinking he's been in the band for decades.

And what gems those decades have yielded. Tonight's setlist encompasses material from 11 of Priest's 18 studio albums, and to the regret of absolutely no one, just one song from their most recent half-dozen. That isn't a jibe at the quality of their recent output – if *Lightning Strike* doesn't quicken your pulse, call your doctor – but with such a deep catalogue to mine, it'd be criminal to ignore material that's resonated for generations.

That's not to say Priest play it safe, though, as tonight's opening song is *Painkiller*'s galloping closer *One Shot At Glory* – a track that, inexplicably, was never performed live until Bloodstock. Better late than never. As a giant cross/pitchfork levitates above the stage – the impressive aesthetic of which brings to mind a combination of *Batman* '89's Axis Chemicals scenes and the background of a side-scrolling, beat-'em-up arcade game – Rob Halford takes the stage looking resplendent in a studded, fringe-sleeved leather jacket, and he wastes no time proving his vocal talents. A shrill, piercing scream punctuates the ending of the aforementioned *Lightning Strike*, and just when you think it's a high note – literally and figuratively – he unleashes another in *A Touch Of Evil*, and then another in *Victim Of Changes*. While his Santa beard may belie his age, there clearly isn't another singer on the planet, 70 years young or otherwise, with the pipes of the Metal God.

Top-shelf anthem *You've Got Another Thing Comin'* sees the first of numerous Rob Halford costume changes, but more so than his attire, it's his commanding presence that catches your eye as he stalks the stage deliberately, huffing and snarling. Later, during *Painkiller*, he sings almost the entire song hunched over like a tortured wizard who's birthing some sort of (black) magic spell.

An unexpected highlight is the sultry groove of the 1986 synth-metal *Turbo Lover*, the chorus of which features one of the night's numerous call-and-response moments of crowd participation. (See also: *Diamonds & Rust*, *Electric Eye*, *Living After Midnight*). Even more unexpected is the potency of the title track of the band's 1970 debut, *Rocka Rolla*. Mothballed for 45 years prior to this tour, it's a fun blast from the past that sounds far fiercer than any song that nearly qualifies for a pensioner discount rightfully should.

During the encore, Rob introduces a "special guest" – Glenn Tipton, who joins the band for its final three songs. Looking fragile but not frail, he sports a shirt and guitar strap that both read 'No Surrender' – not only a fitting motto for one of the genre's most immortal acts, but a rebellious, metallic middle finger to Father Time.

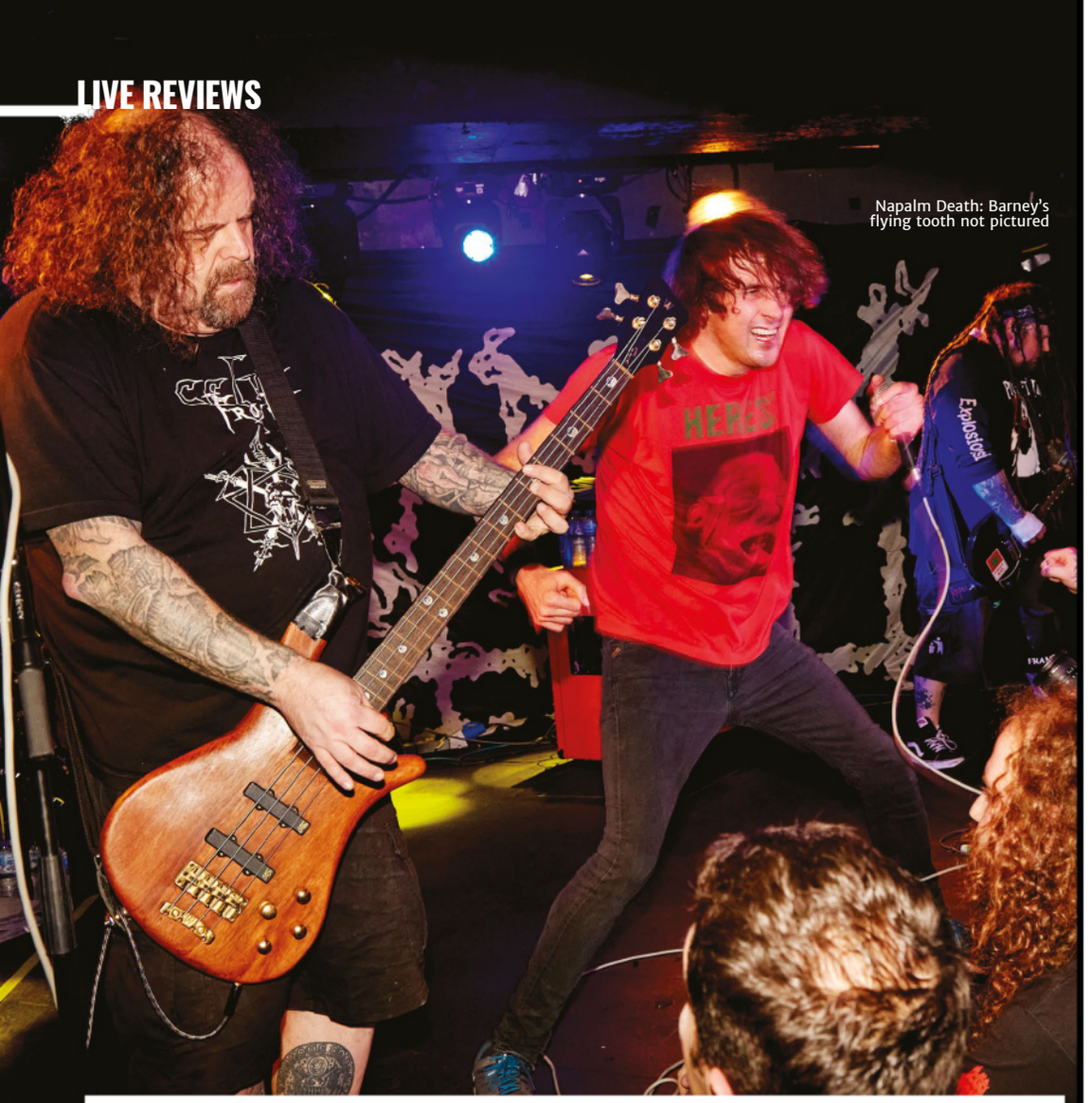
DAVID CLAYTON

STEPHANIE CABRAL

Rob Halford: Santa has a new sleigh

Ian Hill unleashes lightning

Glenn Tipton tiptoes into the set – and smashes it



Napalm Death: Barney's flying tooth not pictured

NAPALM DEATH

DAMIM/10 PLAGUES

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Birmingham's grind gods turn up the heat in Camden

THE SUN IS shining, spring has arrived and Napalm Death are playing a sold-out show at The Underworld. If that isn't enough to fill you with joy, the AC/DC blaring over the PA between bands surely must be. Unfortunately **10 PLAGUES** didn't get the memo, a series of mishaps (ranging from missing members to the fact this is their first ever gig) partially explaining a reedy, unpolished sound. The very fact they play is enough to earn goodwill, however, the band coming through the trial by fire with a few new fans. **DAMIM** have no such sound issues, raging and wailing with a vitality that feels like a portent of the bedlam still to come. With a solid barrage of brutality you could almost miss the panache of the lead guitars, the band somehow managing to swing between epic melodeath, pendulous prog-death and abyssal doom metal whilst maintaining a discernible sonic identity.

"I just lost part of me tooth," frontman Barney Greenway proudly announces partway into **NAPALM DEATH**'s set. "That's how fuckin' hard this is." It's precisely that level of dedication to visceral, physical brutality that explains why Napalm held off livestreaming until they could bring along a rabid moshing, headbanging and braying contingent, livestreaming the grime to the world via Hotel Radio.

You can barely swing a cat in the sold-out venue, but we doubt the headliners would be happy if you did, Napalm having long established themselves as the extreme metal band with heart. Between statements about immigration ("People should not and cannot be illegal") and the sorry state of the planet, Napalm drive the message home with an unstoppable barrage that sees 24 songs fly by in just under 80 minutes.

From speed-freak bait *Fuck The Factoid* to progressive gravitas on *Contagion* and the all-out jazz freakout of *Everyday Pox* (as well as a Bad Brains and Dead Kennedys cover, respectively), Napalm's set is a prime illustration of why they are still extreme metal's most essential band. For some, such a performance would be a career highlight. For Napalm Death it's just Friday night.

RICH HOBSON

MARDUK

VADER

THE GARAGE, LONDON

Titans of their genres, death and black metal behemoths Vader and Marduk have descended upon London for their aptly named United Titans tour. By the time **VADER** take to the stage, the crowd has swelled to pack the venue and the atmosphere is charged with anticipation. Peals of thunder and applause herald their arrival and they launch into a storming *Dark Age*. Every roar and squealing guitar solo is crystal clear and each song is greeted with rabid enthusiasm, testament to their many years penning consistently great death metal. *Silent Empire*, *What Colour Is Your Blood?* and *Sothis* all elicit huge cheers befitting the Poles' iconic status. Besides lights and fog machines, there are no big production tricks, no gimmicks, just an hour-plus of death metal might. Bringing the evening to a close with their frostbitten, battle-primed fury, **MARDUK** are every bit the black metal masters. The opening salvo of *Werwolf* and *The Hangman Of Prague* and a mid-set *Bleached Bones* whip the crowd into a frenzy, Mortuus commanding them with the sheer force of his presence. Even a droning buzz throughout their set can't detract from their profane majesty.

WILL MARSHALL

WIEGEDOOD

OSLO, LONDON

"We are the band whose name is pronounced 'Vee-guh-dood'," singer/guitarist Levy Seynaeve quips after taking the stage. Oslo barely has time to let out its collective chuckle before *FN Scar 16* smashes out of the amplifiers. And so begins a headline set of hyperspeed black metal from these high priests from the Church Of Ra. They may only play 50 minutes, with songs almost entirely lifted from this year's *There's Always Blood At The End Of The Road*, but the incessancy justifies the briefness. Drummer Wim Sreppoc has the stamina of Hercules, laying down nonstop blastbeats while Levy tremolo-picks melodies out of a guitar with the tone of swarming locusts. Second guitarist Gilles Demolder is the most animated of the trio, long brown hair flying as he headbangs ruthlessly. It's the most interesting visual spectacle of the whole set, as the band are largely static beneath an unending red hue. A well-placed *Now Will Always Be* diversifies the night. The eight-minute behemoth incorporates throat chants atop the torrenting black metal – the faintest hit of a refrain among the fury. Sometimes, good things come in small packages, and Wiegedood's short-yet-sweet brutalisation of London has proved it.

MATT MILLS

JAMES SHARROCK

Lzzy Hale extends her band's reach

MARIE KORNER

HALESTORM

SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON

Pennsylvania's arena rockers go for an evening stretch

OF ALL THE bands who have indulged in 'An Evening With…' sets, Halestorm are among the oddest. They're not armed with 30 years of bangers like Machine Head, nor do they specialise in the time-evaporating prog theatrics of Dream Theater. The band only have four albums to their name, and their trade is concise radio rock. Nonetheless, this is an evening for the mega-fans. Lzzy Hale et al previously headlined the 10,000-capacity Alexandra Palace. Tonight is comparatively intimate, and those who nabbed tickets quickly enough are rewarded with a two-and-a-half-hour serenade.

Halestorm commence with a 40-minute acoustic set. The gentle introduction initially works wonders, as Lzzy takes the stage solo for piano ballad *Break In*. The song and the emotional speech that follows – an ode to her parents for supporting her despite disapproving of her dreams – encapsulate the tender capabilities this kind of set can have. Yet, that high is never recaptured. *Mz. Hyde*, *Apocalyptic* and *I Like It Heavy* all have the energetic, full-band verve as usual. London's getting limber, but how much more oomph would these anthems have if the band went balls-out electric?

Halestorm like it heavy – most of the time

Fortunately, the main body of the night is far better suited to Halestorm's earworm-laden arena rock. The production levels up, with static spotlights replaced by a colour-changing logo and erratic strobes. Moreover, the aggressive edge highlights Lzzy's soaring howls, as well as the quartet's penchant for invigorating choruses. *Back From The Dead*, *Rock Show* and *I Get Off* abruptly set London ablaze. However, *Amen* is sullied with tagged-on guitar shreds before the finale, *I Miss The Misery*, is padded ad nauseum. What is normally a three-minute uplift that unites onlookers with its wailing refrain gets more false finishes than *The Return Of The King*, ultimately tripling its own runtime. Not even these 2,000 acolytes, as loyal as they are, remain in awe throughout such stretching.

You can see why Halestorm would dip their toes into the 'Evening With…' setup. They have the fanbase for it, and the lack of a support reduces the risk of Covid spreading on tour. Nonetheless, the over-indulgence takes its toll, and their followers leave not so much fully invigorated, but mellowed by an ending spread a little too thin.

MATT MILLS

In Flames: nautically challenged

IN FLAMES

VEXED/DEFECTS

THEKLA, BRISTOL

Gothenburg's melodeath pioneers warm up in the west

THEKLA IS ONE of Bristol's most beloved venues – not least because it's a converted cargo boat – but its stage limitations are exposed from the moment **DEFECTS** frontman Tony Maue abandons any hope of performing on it and spends the set conducting his business from the floor. A new band from London comprised of members from the likes of The Raven Age, Shvpes and She Must Burn, this is only their second-ever show, but they have a lot of promise. With a sound reminiscent of early Killswitch Engage, the tracks *End Of Days* and *Dream Awake* are warmly received and the audience size easily triples during their set. **VEXED**, meanwhile, are on their first proper tour for three years and on the back of their excellent *Culling Culture* debut record from last year. Benefitting from a rousing sound and a receptive audience, they continue to show why they're one of the best breakthrough bands of the decade thus far, delivering a bruising half hour of nu metal-inspired deathcore that finishes on the ever-excellent *Fake*. For the record, they *do* manage to all fit on stage… just.

Word is that this tour is an intimate warm-up run for **IN FLAMES** before they travel to the States for their dates with Megadeth, Lamb Of God and Trivium. It makes sense, because there's no way they should be playing a venue of this size otherwise, especially when their set features tracks from 11 of their 13 albums; only *Soundtrack To Your Escape* and *Battles* have no representation. It's the middle of the show that gets the audience truly salivating: a showcase of the first five albums, one song from each, in chronological order. From *Behind Space* through to *Pinball Map* via *Graveland*, *The Hive* and *Colony*, the Anders Fridén-fronted Swedish melodeath legends have Bristol eating out of their collective palms and hanging on every note. That's not to say the rest of the set isn't as well-received, but that 20-minute window is where it all reaches fever pitch. If only this show had been in a bigger place.

ELLIOT LEAVER

CRADLE OF FILTH

PRIVATE VENUE, LONDON

Since live music's comeback, Cradle Of Filth really have tried to make every show a must-see. They toured America last year, playing *Cruelty And The Beast* in full every night, before returning home for a Halloween gig jammed with rarities and new material. Now Dani Filth's bleak circus aren't only honouring the vernal equinox with a livestream, they're wishing second album *Dusk… And Her Embrace* a belated 25th birthday. Dani's dressed to match, trading corpsepaint for his classic raven eyeliner, but not everything's as thought through. The stage is an empty warehouse with a tree trunk in the middle. It looks a bit shit. And *Dusk…* hasn't aged remarkably. The quirks that define Cradle today – back-and-forth screeches and croons, soaring guitar leads, extreme earworms – were still in utero in 1996. As a result, the greatest hits encore more clearly flaunts the sextet's strengths. Clean singer Anabelle Iratni drives *Right Wing Of The Garden Triptych* between its plethora of solos, before *Necromantic Fantasies* claws at the brain with its grunted hook. Plenty yearn for the resurrection of the Cradle of yore, but tonight's juxtaposition of 'then and now' proves the band are currently penning better songs than ever before.

MATT MILLS

GOD IS AN ASTRONAUT

ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Originally scheduled to coincide with the 15th anniversary of second album *All Is Violent, All Is Bright*, this show was intended to play that breakthrough live in full. But a lot has happened over the past two years, including God Is An Astronaut releasing the brilliant *Ghost Tapes #10*. Wisely, perhaps, we get a smattering of tracks from both albums with the tranquil, dreamy soundscapes of *Forever Lost* and the title track from the former going up against harder-hitting, more instantaneous thrills such as *Adrift* and *Burial* from the latter. While the predominantly instrumental quartet have no central visual focal point, they provide spectacle en masse, writhing and swaying as one amorphous unit. The energy coming from the stage is palpable; this is no introspective, chin-stroking, shoegaze post-rock show but rather a joyous, kinetic and often intense expression through music. Imagine the riffs of Helmet presented with the aural wonder of Sigur Rós and you're halfway there. With a setlist culled exclusively from the bookends of God Is An Astronaut's career, it gives perspective on the progressions the band have made in their-two decade tenure – if not the full picture.

REMFRY DEDMAN

JANSON BULPIN

Wardruna whip up the crowd's inner lupines

JAKE OWENS

WARDRUNA

JO QUAIL

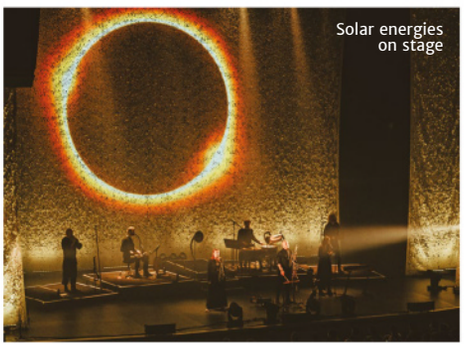
ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON

Norway's pagan folk seers return from the wilderness

"OWOOOOO!" THE SEATED audience at London's Royal Festival Hall, a rarefied cultural institution, howl like wolves as Wardruna launch into *Grá*. When the Norwegian spiritual metallers released fifth album *Kvitravn* in January 2021, they organised a livestreamed launch show, but this the first time they've played since – and people are hungry for animalistic connection.

But before that, **JO QUAIL** ushers us into the experience, fresh from supporting dark singer-songwriter A.A. Williams. Bathed in red light, she performs three lengthy compositions by plucking phrases on her golden, skeletal cello, looping them, and building up a whirlwind of sound. The centrepiece, *Gold*, is based on the energies of earth, fire, air and water, and melodies dance around a grounding heartbeat. Like Wardruna, it's elemental.

Spotlighted against a white backdrop, with the silhouettes of their bodies and instruments picked out at key moments like real-life shadow puppets, **WARDRUNA** are arresting from the off. They open with *Kvitravn*, welcoming us into their world, which



Solar energies on stage

brings the Norse traditions of old into the present day to awaken and connect us. After multiple lockdowns and the constant spectres of Covid and war, it's a much-needed release. *Skugge* follows, with all seven musicians harmonising, their low vocal vibrations coursing through the room like a current.

Even though they're touring off the back of *Kvitravn*, tonight's setlist spans Wardruna's whole career, making for an absorbing, cinematic experience. During *Solringen ('The Ring Of The Sun')* a dramatic eclipse is projected, as bandleader Einar drums on a branch. When co-vocalist Lindy-Fay Hella screams in *Heimta Thurs*, strobes flash frantically. For *Tyr*, orange lights flicker like flames, while Einar and sage musician Eilif Gundersen play huge bronze lurs – curled horns that look like steampunk antlers. But even stripped down, *Voluspá*, from 2018's acoustic album *Skald*, showcases the primal power of Einar's voice. The wolf cries are provoked by *Grá* – a song that recalls a time when humans co-existed alongside wild animals. Einar sits on a pelt, while Lindy-Fay and Kalandra vocalist Katrine Stenbekk tap bones together.

At the close of *Odal*, Wardruna get a standing ovation. "All right, settle down," Einar laughs, speaking for the first time. "Fuck, that was a long wait, wasn't it?" Someone screams – "I love you, Einar!" They finish with revered funeral song *Helvegen*, and though the band depart, Einar stays behind to play *Snake Pit Poetry* from the TV show *Vikings*. "I wish you a beautiful evening," he says, by way of a goodbye. "It's a full moon, so be careful…"

ELEANOR GOODMAN

Unto Others' Gabriel Franco: goth metal's man in black

UNTO OTHERS

ZETRA

THE UNDERWORLD LONDON

Portland's goth metal frontrunners reveal their crossover potential

If you want to push an 80s theme for your night, **ZETRA** are fast becoming the go-to band. The stage looks like an industrial club hangout for The Lost Boys, and the two members – an androgynous-voiced vamp on guitar/vocals and a Flock Of Seagulls renegade on keys – are dressed like black metal monks. This, however, is synthwave in slo-mo, a cinematic trawl that gives their shoegaze dynamic a retro-futuristic bent. Right now, though, Zetra trade on atmosphere more than dynamics, their songs setting a scene without developing it much, but a rapt crowd at the front suggests their star is rising.

Zetra claim a vampyric victory

In the three years since they last played the UK, as Idle Hands, **UNTO OTHERS** have gone from grassroots phenomenon to a band whose crossover potential looks boundless. Metalheads of all stripes are crammed in front of the stage, and when they launch straight into *Heroin*, Gabriel Franco's opening roar and the breakneck, adrenaline-mainlining groove that erupts have the immediately exultant, fist-raising effect that stars-in-the-making are made of.

Behind his shades, Gabriel exudes a can't-fake-it charisma that doesn't come from showmanship so much as a palpable sense that, for all the anthemic power of their songs, there's a heart and soul in their centre. As much as UO may draw from classic metal and goth, they don't let their sources do all the heavy lifting for them, *Give Me To The Night* and *When Will Gods Work Be Done* resonating with a fraught urgency and plaintive reach – exemplified in their cover of the Ramones' *Pet Sematary* – that feels like our own lives being fully dramatised. As the closing *Double Negative* sends everyone into the night emboldened and recharged, Unto Others both justify all the recent hype and stake their claim as rock's next torchbearers.

JONATHAN SELZER

DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL

URNE

THE FLEECE, BRISTOL

As impressive as last year's debut record *Serpent & Spirit* was, **URNE** sound even more vital in the flesh. Whether it's the monstrous rumble of *A Tomb So Frail*, *The Palace Of Devils & Wolves*' galvanising riffs, or *Desolate Heart*'s soulful leads and mazy crescendo, the London trio rule the line between punishing weight and vulnerability. But if the crowd aren't yet fully roused, that changes as soon as **DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL** emerge. Even in such a modest venue, they create an atmosphere worthy of a genuine event. While their last headline run five years ago was a nostalgic celebration of debut *A Fragile Hope*, tonight concentrates firmly on the present and future. Most of 2021's *Loss* album gets an airing, encompassing all the dynamics, fire and sentiment their followers adore. Having two lead singers still makes things a bit crowded onstage, but there's no doubting either's energy or assurance as *Beyond Reach* crackles chaotically and *The Narcissist* makes its monolithic entrance. *Devastator* and *Burdened* wash over you with molten lava one second and a relieving wave the next, before the absorbing and meandering *Crane Lake*, and a riveting encore of *Darkness Prevails* and *Like It's Your Last*.

ADAM REES

THE RUINS OF BEVERAST

GRAVE MIASMA/FUOCO FATUO

ELECTROWERKZ, LONDON

There's been some kickback against calling gigs 'rituals' of late. However, if magic is about changing consciousness, then this is very much a ritual. Bathed in red light, Italy's **FUOCO FATUO** plumb the depths of some medieval Hell to drag up the sound of tormented souls. From glacial dirges to furious blasts, they evoke a fearsome sense of foreboding. For the those in the know, **GRAVE MIASMA** have long been one of the best death-metal bands on the planet and tonight is a hometown triumph. Their cavernous, arcane metal is both ferocious and ethereal. The dingy Electrowerkz is the perfect setting for their twisted ritualistic set; *Guardians Of Death* practically reeks of incense while *Seven Coils* summons ancient gods best left buried. **THE RUINS OF BEVERAST** are a Lovecraftian descent into madness. Drawing heavily on last year's *The Thule Grimoires*, they open with *Ropes Into Eden*, a dark, brooding and cinematic epic that draws at times on death, doom and black metal. *Anchoress In Furs* and *The Clockhand's Groaning Circles* are your worst nightmares given sonic form. It's rare indeed to see three bands this strong on one bill; now you will know why you're afraid of the dark.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

TOM RUSSELL

Ensiferum give their verdict on the sound mix

Dark Tranquillity: Mikael Stanne delivers

DEREK BREMNER

DARK TRANQUILLITY/ENSIFERUM

NAILED TO OBSCURITY

HEAVEN, LONDON

Scandic metal masters go head-to-head for an epic match-up

'HEAVEN' IS A misnomer tonight. In the aftermath of the vernal equinox, two Scandinavian co-headliners are out to turn London's premier 'gay club and occasional extreme metal hangout' into Valhalla with vicious yet triumphant singalongs. Before that ebullience can seize control, **NAILED TO OBSCURITY** stamp hearts with their prog-metal-studded death/doom. *Black Frost* opens and introduces the quintet as the nihilistic lovechild of Paradise Lost and Opeth. A new number from the Germans' impending fifth album commences with the greatest lead line that Greg Mackintosh never wrote, before plodding through ominous chords and choking roars.

ENSIFERUM quite literally add more colour to proceedings. Their backdrop flaunts a golden logo emblazoned on blue and crimson artwork, and their folk metal is infinitely peppier than the gloom that preceded it. The Finns are dressed for the occasion as ever, Viking war paint complementing their battle-ready anthems. Unfortunately, a muddy mix drowns any vibrance that could have been tapped from these keys- and traditional-instrument-backed tunes. It's a homogenised hour devoid of highlights, but at least it doesn't stop Heaven from losing its shit, moshing and chanting at any available excuse.

If we were to name the most underrated bands in all of metal, **DARK TRANQUILLITY** would be at the top of the list. Since 1993 they've been restlessly innovating in the melodic death metal space, broadening its potential with goth, prog and tech metal while In Flames disowned the genre and At The Gates split up. As a result, seeing the pioneers play a club this intimate 30 years in feels wrong. It hasn't disheartened Mikael Stanne, though. The frontman is all smiles all night, joyously teasing his audience as they fail time and time again to predict the next song in the setlist. You'd expect 75 minutes dominated by cuts from 2020's *Moment*, but the Swedes play just as much as from middle-era classics *Damage Done* and *Fiction*, as well as the hit-laden *Atoma*. *Focus Shift*, *Monochromatic Stains* and *Forward Momentum* in sequence perfectly encapsulate the explosive nature of their songwriting. Not even the absence of lead guitarist Christopher Amott, who flew home to be with his wife as she gave birth, can dampen the euphoria. Heaven clings to every note – another testament that this sextet deserve to ascend to melodeath godhood.

MATT MILLS

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OCEANS OF SLUMBER

The band's frontwoman on being raised by cultists and how #BlackLivesMatter changed metal

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURE: JAMIE LACOMBE

You talked about opening a capybara sanctuary during the pandemic. Did you get anywhere with that?
"Ha ha ha! It didn't work out. We were moving and there was a house on stilts. I was like, 'This would be perfect! Old capybaras could live underneath!' We ended up not moving there, so there went my sanctuary dreams."

Is it true that your dad was the director of a choir?
"It's a lot more sinister than that. He was the choir director for a cult. He did all the music directing."

That's wild! How did he get involved in that?
"Both of my parents were very religious. It was the 70s and 80s, and he was a musician that did a lot of drugs. He met somebody at a party or something; they got to talking about God and the universe and all this. I guess he liked what he heard. He wasn't one of the founders but he was definitely there at the beginning. It's called the Institute Of Divine Metaphysical Research and he was involved until I was eight or nine. My mum's family are Jehovah's Witnesses, which is a much more likeable but also strict Christian order. She was seeing him and going [to cult gatherings] with him. She became a Jehovah's Witness when I was around eight or nine, so we stopped going with him and started going with her."

Are they still involved in these very religious groups?
"My dad passed away in 2014. He didn't stay with it; he loved to read and explore religions, so he went on his own tangent of learning and religious education. My mum is still a strong, practising, proud Jehovah's Witness."

How did they react to grunge and metal becoming a part of your life?
"All my albums had to be screened. If they had cuss words and stuff, then I didn't get to keep them. So my friends burned me albums and I'd just change the labels. It took my mum a while to get around to understanding that just because people are screaming, that doesn't mean that they're saying terrible things. She likes everything that I do, though, because I'm her daughter. Ha ha! But, yeah, the genre as a whole doesn't necessarily have her vote."

"MY DAD WAS THE CHOIR DIRECTOR FOR A RELIGIOUS CULT"

Were they strict with you socially as well?
"The way that I was allowed to dress and the peers that I was allowed to have were really restricted. Jehovah's Witnesses don't celebrate birthdays, or any major religious holidays. I wasn't allowed to go to Christmas and birthday parties; that's prime socialising time when you're at school. I made up for it by reading. My parents didn't really censor literature, so I could read about anything. I read a bunch of murder-mystery stuff and now I'm into serial killers. Ha ha!"

It's been nearly two years since the worldwide #BlackLivesMatter protests. Do you think rock and metal has become a better place for black people in that time?
"I think so. I think everyone, especially in the music industry, has learned a lot about inclusiveness, and about the importance of history and representation of minorities. I feel like there's so much more room for everybody to speak about their experiences, and people will listen in a way that they weren't before. It feels a lot easier to be at shows. That whole year brought so much to the surface. That's what I love about music and musical people; we're some of the most malleable on the planet. We can be a lot more compassionate to the nuances of other people's experiences and lives. We learn quicker because music is always new and expanding your brain."

What can you tell us about the next Oceans Of Slumber album?
"The record comes out in July. I think I'm allowed to say that. It's called *Starlight And Ash*, and there's gonna be a new single every month until the album is released. I'm giving you permission: tell the people! How much trouble do people get into with these things? Ha ha! What are they gonna do? Kick me out of the band?"

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